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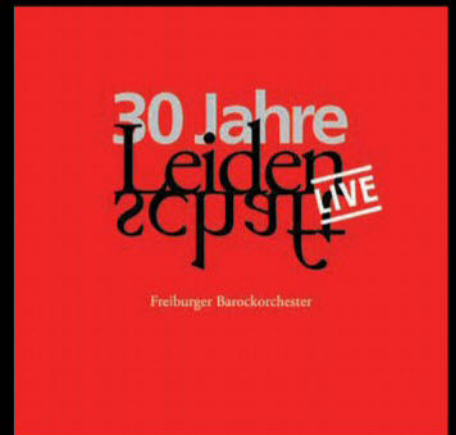
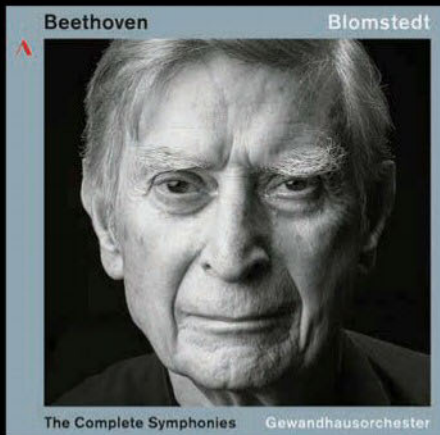
Martyn Brabbins records
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SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Debussy • Rameau

'The Unbroken Line'

Debussy Images, Book 1. Préludes, Book 2

Rameau Castor et Pollux - Tristes apprêts (arr LaDeur). Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de clavecin - Gavotte et six doubles

Jeffrey LaDeur *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1654 (70' • DDD)



Right underneath Jeffrey LaDeur's name on the CD booklet's back is the name of the

piano technician, Christopher Johnson, yet not a word about the actual piano! It appears to be an evenly regulated and responsive instrument, although producer Matt Carr's intimate engineering compels one to scrutinise its potential for tonal nuances and shadings at a range some listeners might feel to be uncomfortably close.

To my ears, the recorded sound undermines LaDeur's scrupulous fingerwork in the first book of *Images*. The sheen and shimmer we expect at the climax of 'Reflets dans l'eau' is missing. The long, churning lines of 'Mouvement' emerge choppy and notey, while 'Hommage à Rameau' rarely ventures beyond *mezzo-piano* and *mezzo-forte* parameters. The *Préludes* fare better, on the whole. Instead of the usual murk and mystery, we hear the textural levels of 'Brouillards' clearly differentiated, as well as the *détaché* bass lines of 'Feuilles mortes' phrased as written. LaDeur finds just enough alluring dynamic gradations and curvaceously shaped flourishes in 'La puerta del vino' to qualify for sexy, but the fourth *Prélude*'s fairies scamper with a slightly heavy gait. General Lavine's eccentric dance conveys an idiomatically lilting 'oom-pah' beat.

If the close-up sound sucks up a good percentage of the atmosphere of 'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune', the watery evocations of 'Ondine' benefit from lovely pedalling on the pianist's part. LaDeur brings a welcome ragtime sensibility to the dotted rhythms in 'Hommage à S. Pickwick' and makes sense of the sudden, wispy mood

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...*

Lomazov-Rackers Piano Duo

Marina Lomazov and Joseph Rackers talk about their new Stravinsky album

The piano-duet version of Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petrushka* is not often played. Is there a reason for this?

It could be due to the popularity of the solo piano version, or that many duos choose to perform *The Rite of Spring* instead. In any case, we are glad that not too many duos perform *Petrushka*!

The four-hand version of *The Rite of Spring* is often played on two pianos. Are there advantages to playing it on one instrument?

For us, a striking aspect of the duo piano version of *The Rite of Spring* is the transparency of the texture and the clarity that comes across, in contrast to the shocking effects and range of colour in the orchestral version. We feel that performing the work on a single piano brings out this quality in an especially compelling way.

What are the technical challenges of playing this at one keyboard?



The biggest challenges are coordinating hand movements in a confined space and being inventive with pedalling, to maximise the orchestral impression of the piece.

What are your next recording plans?

Among several projects we are considering is recording Mozart's sonatas for piano, four-hands. These are masterpieces that we often include in our recital programmes, sometimes next to Stravinsky. We would also like to release a collection of live performances in the future, including modern works that we have commissioned or which are unfamiliar to listeners.

swings in 'Canope'. No 11's thirds may not match Steven Osborne (Hyperion, 10/06) for dazzle and suppleness but LaDeur plunges fearlessly into 'Feux d'artifice', never letting the energy hit ground.

LaDeur brackets the Debussy selections with two Rameau pieces. The concluding *Gavotte et six doubles* contains beautifully turned ornaments but the repeated notes fall flat. The pianist's opening transcription of 'Tristes apprêts' from *Castor et Pollux* is a masterpiece of understatement, simplicity and 'old school' chord-playing where every note sings out with meaning. Would LaDeur make even stronger an impression live in concert? **Jed Distler**

Hahn

'Amour sans ailes'

Rêverie. Chansons grises. Trois jours de vendange. Études latines - Lydé; Pholoé.

L'incrédule. Nocturne. Dans la nuit. La chère blessure. Love Without Wings. L'énamourée.

À Chloris. Fêtes galantes

Zachary Gordin *bar* Bryan Nies *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1649 (46' • DDD • T/t)



Zachary Gordin and his regular recital partner, Bryan Nies, opt for Hahn for their



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Admirably restrained and unsentimental: baritone Zachary Gordin and pianist Bryan Nies have recorded a disc of songs by Reynaldo Hahn

first album together, strikingly programmed, if, at 46 minutes, rather short. Gordin gives us *Chansons grises* complete, allowing us to hear the familiar 'L'heure exquise' in the wider context of the Verlaine settings that frame it. And he also gives us the brooding 1899 cycle *Love Without Wings*, to texts by the English poet Mary Frances Robinson (1857-1944), which may form a reflection on Hahn's relationship with Proust: the text of the final song, 'I know you love me not', bears so striking a resemblance to a famous letter from Proust to Hahn near the end of their affair ('Je crois que ... vous ne m'aimez plus', etc) that the similarities cannot be put down entirely to coincidence.

Gordin communicates tangible pleasure in his material. There's wit in 'Fêtes galantes', pride as well as wonder in 'À Chloris' and lofty nobility in the extracts from *Études latines*. Gordin's voice, however, is unevenly produced. A pulse in his upper registers makes its presence felt in the opening 'Rêverie' and sometimes gets in the way later on. His soft singing can be beautiful: the way he almost whispers 'L'heure exquise' is captivating but there's also a moment near the beginning of 'Paysage triste', also from *Chansons grises*, where his intonation wavers. Nies is an attractive accompanist, admirably restrained and unsentimental. It's an engaging disc; but to hear Hahn-singing at its best, you need to turn to Véronique Gens (Alpha, 1/16) and Susan Graham (Sony, 9/98), still leaders in the field. **Tim Ashley**

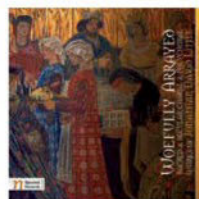
Little

Woefully Arrayed, Op 13^a. *Kyrie*, Op 5^b.
Gloria, Op 18^c. *Wasted and Worn*, Op 6^d.
That Time of Year, Op 2^d

^{ac}**Vox Futura / Andrew Shenton** with

^a**Heinrich Christensen** ^{org} ^b**Thomas Tallis**
Society Choir / Philip Simms; The Stanbery
Singers / Paul John Stanbery

Navona © NV6113 (70' • DDD • T/t)



The best way to experience the works by Jonathan David Little on this disc

may not be through the recording, though by all means partake of it. The Australian-born composer has cast his resplendent sacred and secular pieces in the polychoral style of the Renaissance and early Baroque, calling for choral forces to be placed in various configurations and spaces to achieve the intended sonic and expressive effect. Although much of the impact can be discerned through speakers or earbuds, hearing them in an actual acoustic environment would add even more lustre.

The booklet notes include drawings of the different placement of voices, helping greatly to convey what Little intends. For example, in the disc's most expansive piece, the 25-minute *Woefully Arrayed* – its title drawn from the text attributed to John Skelton, not a comment on the unusual arrangement of singers – some altos and

tenors and all basses are aligned up front, while sopranos and other altos sing from behind them or above in galleries.

What is most important is the music itself, which sounds at once ancient and modern. Little shows masterly command of the choral idiom in the luminous interweaving of voices and occasional solo flights. Aside from *Woefully Arrayed*, which includes organ accompaniment, the works are *a cappella* settings. The repertoire is performed by Vox Futura (Boston), The Stanbery Singers (Cincinnati) and the Thomas Tallis Society Choir (Greenwich, London), all of whom sound mesmerised by Little's engaging music. **Donald Rosenberg**

Mahler

Symphony No 8

Oria Boylan, Celena Shafer, Amy Owens *sops*

Charlotte Hellekant, Tamara Mumford *mezs* **Barry**

Banks *ten* **Markus Werba** *bar* **Jordan Bisch** *bass*

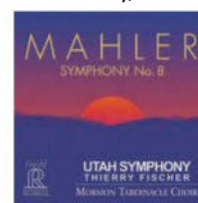
Choristers of the Madeleine Choir School;

Mormon Tabernacle Choir; Utah Symphony

Orchestra / Thierry Fischer

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Recorded live at the Salt Lake Tabernacle,
Salt Lake City, February 19 & 20, 2016



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VIOLIN CONCERTO, OP. 61

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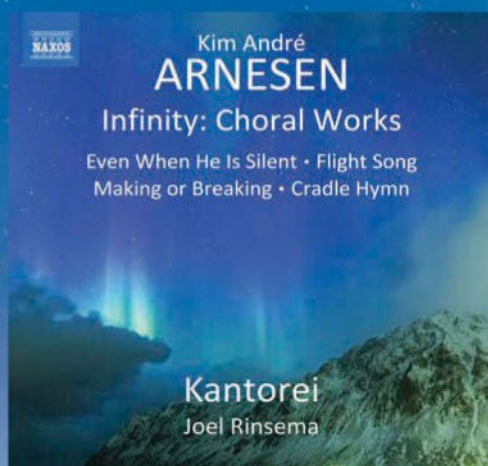
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Mahler cycle. Under Thierry Fischer, Utah's music director since 2009, they have mounted another Mahler cycle in celebration of the orchestra's 75th anniversary. The Eighth was recorded live in two performances at Salt Lake City's Mormon Tabernacle in February 2016.

And a lovely thing it is. Thierry Fischer is clearly a Mahlerian to contend with, full of ideas and with the wherewithal to execute them. Soloists are well chosen for the contrasting qualities of their voices, a distinct plus for the characterisations in Part 2. The combined forces of the 392-voice Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the 51 choristers of the Madeleine Choir School don't quite equal the 850 voices at Mahler's disposal for the 1910 premiere, but they provide plenty of vocal heft. Both groups are superbly prepared. The orchestra have never sounded better, with a notably fine wind choir. Soundmirror, responsible for recording and post-production under Reference Recordings' aegis, have captured the famous acoustic of the Mormon Tabernacle with remarkable skill.

The degree of extended exultation in the 'Veni Creator' can overwhelm to the point of exhaustion. One of the great strengths of this performance, however, is that the mighty power surge unleashed by the full-organ E flat chord spans the entire movement like a giant rainbow. Within, tensions build and subside, colours darken and reignite but, above it all, a giant arc spans the entire 22 minutes of the hymn. It's an arc that contains, elevates and animates Mahler's golden textures, lending the entire 'Veni Creator' a rare coherence and shapely splendour. During the orchestral interludes, Fischer is particularly adept at recalibrating the momentum. The result is an ecstasy that soars but never threatens to veer out of control.

If one might wish for greater dynamic contrasts in the Faust scene, a pungent atmosphere – alternately desolate, yearning, supplicating, ascendant – is nevertheless achieved with considerable nuance and subtlety. The soloists acquit themselves marvellously, with Markus Werba's Pater Ecstaticus and Barry Banks's Pater Marianus particular standouts. Apart from the pleasures of so much excellent music-making, one feels that Fischer has added something to our collective wisdom about Mahler's realisation of Goethe.

This Mahler Eighth may not replace your favourite, be it by Horenstein or Stokowski, Bernstein or Solti, Sinopoli or Abbado, but it will surely complement any of them in its grand trajectory, intelligence, clarity and beautiful sound. **Patrick Rucker**

Myers

Ether Music

David Lee Myers *elec*s

Starkland © ST227 (57) • DDD



David Lee Myers (b1949; aka – between 1987 and 1993 – 'Arcane Device') is a

leading figure in American electroacoustic music, most specifically of 'feedback music', created entirely synthetically with no standard acoustical sound input (so his music is properly considered purely electronic). Myers's creations in this field – he does not see himself as a composer as such – have been described variously as 'the sound of electricity singing to itself' or 'sounds from the ether', the latter providing the title for this latest album.

The works here have all been created by Myers using his own invention, the feedback workstation, an electronic fusion of mixing board, computer, synthesiser and ring modulators. The results are a little startling at first, although the first track, 'implicate order', eases one in gently. For large stretches not much seems to happen, giving the feeling of a form of electronic minimalism, but later tracks – for instance, 'what's happening inside highs and lows' – introduce sonorities that sound as if reimagined from 'real' inputs, such as drills or motor saws.

There's little separation between tracks, so 'Ether Music' plays as if it were one large, hour-long composition (sorry, David). It has a rather mesmeric attraction and travels in the way any large-scale piece should do, not unlike, say, Paul Dolden's (Starkland, 1/15). Some might aver that this is just (semi-organised) noise, not music, but I would disagree; it may not be particularly to my taste but this is music in any meaningful definition of the word. The sound, recorded and mixed by Myers himself, must be heard as being to specification. Feedback welcome! **Guy Rickards**

Stravinsky

The Rite of Spring.

Three Movements from Petrushka

Lomazov-Rackers Piano Duo

MSR Classics © MS1628 (48) • DDD



Stravinsky's four-hand transcription of the complete *Petrushka* ballet has often been

recorded, but not his duet versions of the three movements arranged as piano solos for Arthur Rubinstein. The duet versions basically sound like the solo versions but a little fuller, and less of a virtuoso tour de force due to the fact that more hands make lighter work. At the same time, the Shrovetide Fair's rapid chords and polyrhythmic textures benefit from the added security and clarity obtained by two pairs of hands. Indeed, security and clarity essentially define Marina Lomazov and Joseph Rackers's performances.

Most duos find that the *The Rite of Spring*'s frequent hand crossings and other issues concerning congested fingering traffic can be circumvented by playing the work on two pianos rather than one. Lomazov and Rackers, however, opt for a single keyboard. This probably explains, in Part 1, why the Introduction and 'Les augures printaniers' are rhythmically square and dynamically constricted. Or why 'Jeu du rapt' lacks the scurrying lightness of Eden and Tamir's wonderfully incisive recording (Decca, 6/70), or why the savage momentum of 'Jeux des cités rivales' never lets loose.

For whatever reason, Part 2 inspires more assured and centred pianism. The players avoid the easy temptation to milk 'Cercles mystérieux des adolescentes' and give welcome melodic shape to the chromatic runs of 'Glorification de l'élue'. They bring balletic flow and lilt to the 'Danse sacrée' finale's rhythmic asymmetry, while gracefully differentiating the *Sostenuto e maestoso* section's interweaving ostinatos and flourishes (*pesante*, after all, does not mean percussive!). A few notes knocked out of tune in the process should be considered battle scars rather than production flaws. One could imagine more impact and fullness of body to the recorded sound yet a realistic concert-hall ambience still comes through. **Jed Distler**

'Elegia'

Cage Clarinet Sonata Cavallini Adagio and

Tarantella^a Cope Sirocco Magnani Elegia^a

Rabaud Solo de concours, Op 101 Saint-Saëns

Clarinet Sonata, Op 167^a Verdi La forza del destino^a – Andante^a

Christopher Nichols *cl*^a Julie Nishimura *pf*

Navona © NV6120 (53) • DDD



Christopher Nichols and his accompanist Julie Nishimura are colleagues at the

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Pictured: Cecilia Bartoli (Decca)/© Uli Weber/St Petersburg 2014) who featured on the November 2014 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$136.50; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (\$94); Digital Club (\$130); Gramophone Club (\$168). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe \$28.99 Rest of World \$35.75. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com



Masterly technique and programming savvy: Gail Archer plays Russian music with sweeping assurance and stamina

University of Delaware. Their programme, primarily designed to showcase Nichols's playing, is a real mixed bag including clarinet classics (Cavallini, Magnani, Verdi), a test piece for the Paris Conservatoire (Rabaud) and two sonatas from the extremes of the careers of one of the 20th century's most provocative composers – John Cage – and one of the 19th's most popular, Saint-Saëns. These two works were written just 12 years apart, Cage's unaccompanied Sonata in 1933, revised in 1963, and Saint-Saëns's – his penultimate composition – in 1921.

The Frenchman's sonata is a beautifully crafted, late-autumnal work as one might expect from a composer in his mid-eighties. Nichols gives a very fluent account, relishing the many different textures the master orchestrator deployed, and Nishimura's accompaniment is sensitive and never overshadows her partner. This applies, too, for Rabaud's challenging, expressive *Solo de concours* (1901) and the wistful *Andante* from Verdi's *La forza del destino*, often used as an audition test piece. (It is not clear which version has been used: not Richard Stoltzman's, I think; perhaps Ben Armato's.) I was less taken with Cavallini's mundane *Adagio and Tarantella* and Aurelio Magnani's *Elegia*. Magnani, like Armato, was a performer and teacher; *Elegia* is fluently written, beautifully played but rather dull and misplaced as title-track.

There is nothing dull about Cage's four-minute, fairly tame Sonata (astonishing to

think some players refused to perform it!), or Kevin J Cope's *Sirocco* (2012) for the instrument in A, a clever little tone poem juxtaposing then blending elements of European and African (well, African American!) musics to depict the hot wind that blows from the one continent to the other. Good, natural sound. **Guy Rickards**

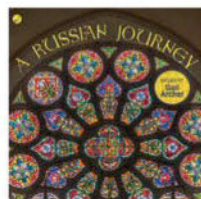
'A Russian Journey'

Cui Two Preludes **Glazunov** Prelude and Fugue, Op 98 **Lyapunov** Prelude pastorale, Op 54 **Mussorgsky** Night on the Bare Mountain **Schawersaschwili** Prelude and Fugue **S Slonimsky** Toccata

Gail Archer *org*

Meyer Media © MM17035 (58' • DDD)

Played on the Schlicker organ of St Joseph Catholic Church, Macon, GA



The superb musicianship, masterly technique and programming savvy informing the American organist Gail Archer's previous Meyer Media releases prevail throughout 'A Russian Journey'. Of the two César Cui Preludes that open the disc, the G minor is the more interesting on account of its sombre countenance and slowly building climax. By contrast, Lyapunov's *Prelude pastorale* has the restless chromaticism and subtle invention of Liszt's finest organ works; its softer, lyrical

sections showcase Archer's ability to spin long yet well-defined legato lines.

Glazunov's D minor Prelude and Fugue (actually two fugues) begins with a rather anonymous and generic chordal section that could have been written by 30 possible composers. But once the counterpoint kicks in, Glazunov's harmonic sophistication catapults to the foreground. Archer clearly revels in the codetta's massive sonorities; in her excellent booklet notes, she associates them with the sound of Russian Orthodox male choirs, but I liken these pages to 'Reger on steroids'. It says a lot for Sergey Slonimsky's fluent organ-writing that his Toccata's busy textures never clutter, yet I find his consistent use of bitonality more fatiguing than challenging to absorb.

Archer's attraction to the poignant melodies and modal leanings of Alexander Schawersaschwili's Prelude and Fugue is well justified and makes me want to explore his music further. The Hungarian organist/composer Zsigmond Szathmáry's arrangement of Mussorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain* mirrors Rimsky-Korsakov's reorchestration to brilliant effect, while throwing all kinds of technical hurdles at the organist. Archer's sweeping assurance and stamina enable you to hear the music behind the virtuosity.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the colourful 53-rank Schlicker organ at St Joseph Church in Macon, Georgia, clearly and vividly reproduced via Andreas K Meyer's production. **Jed Distler**

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Streaming, studio recordings ... here's to 2018!

January. A point when people, having looked backwards (as we've just done with our free digimag featuring all 2017's Editor's Choices – find it via gramophone.co.uk) now look forwards.

Such is the pace of change that only with a very misplaced sense of crystal-ball-confidence could anyone predict exactly what will happen next year. But you can look at trends, both those specifically related to classical music, but also those in the wider world too.

Starting with technology, I've been encountering many adverts of late for Alexa, Amazon's voice-activated personal assistant, an indication of just how much is being invested in the concept (and as Andrew Everard reports in the Audio pages, Amazon is not alone).

Perhaps you're not the sort of person who wants to call out a request and have it swiftly played. I'm not sure I am. But many might be. I just tried asking Siri, Apple's equivalent, to 'Play me some Beethoven' and within seconds was offered a playlist starting with Carlos Kleiber's Beethoven Fifth, followed by Fricsay's Beethoven Seventh, followed by Gilels playing the *Pathétique*. Not bad. But what about more specific requests? That poses significant challenges. But if this is to be part of home hi-fi's future, the classical industry will want to make sure it finds solutions.

Streaming continues to go from strength to strength. A major label revealed just the other day that streaming revenue has, for them, overtaken downloads when it comes to digital income – and they're not the first. As well as the cross-genre services (Apple Music, Spotify, Qobuz et al), there are classical-specific players trying to establish themselves in the market, and this month,



Martin

as we report in our news pages, one has even done a deal with the Vienna Philharmonic to release new recordings exclusively via its service. Perhaps it stands to reason that, as it grows, streaming will seek to offer not just a variant on how to access existing recordings, but also an entirely new channel for releases in the first place. And speaking of alternative channels, as our supplement revealed recently, the digital concert hall sector shows every sign of good health. With more live performances archived and available than ever before, how should we consider them alongside, say, DVDs, when discussing the 'catalogue'?

As for the recordings themselves, a simple glance (let alone an attempt to lift) *Gramophone's* daily postbag is cause for confidence. It's more than a decade since we were told that EMI's *Tristan und Isolde* with Domingo would be the last major studio opera recording. Well, time has thankfully proved that to have been far from the case, and from Opera Rara's bold rarities to Erato's new *Les Troyens* (recorded from concerts, but nevertheless concerts conceived as a recording project), impressive sets continue to reach us. Meanwhile, beautifully presented CD box-sets continue to delight and, from my knowledge of what many labels are planning next year, this will continue throughout 2018. The vinyl revival isn't unwinding either. Thus, through a combination of an imaginative industry looking both forwards and backwards, I think we can be safely optimistic about what the year ahead holds for classical listeners. A very happy new year to you all.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I admit I've got a soft spot for postwar British symphonies', says **RICHARD BRATBY**, 'and I can't think of

any composer the 21st century needs to rediscover more urgently than Sir Michael Tippett. It was huge fun chatting to Martyn Brabbins – a hero to all who enjoy exploring neglected repertoire.'



'Writing at length about Matthias Pintscher was an especial pleasure', says **RICHARD WHITEHOUSE**,

author of this issue's Contemporary Composer feature. 'I have been a great admirer of Pintscher's music ever since it was first performed in the UK almost a quarter of a century ago.'



'I loved working my way through the recordings of Giordano's best-known opera,' says **HUGO SHIRLEY**,

who wrote this month's Collection on *Andrea Chénier*. 'It's a wonderful score, brimming with melody and larger-than-life drama. Many of the greatest singers ever captured on record have sung the piece.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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EDITORIAL

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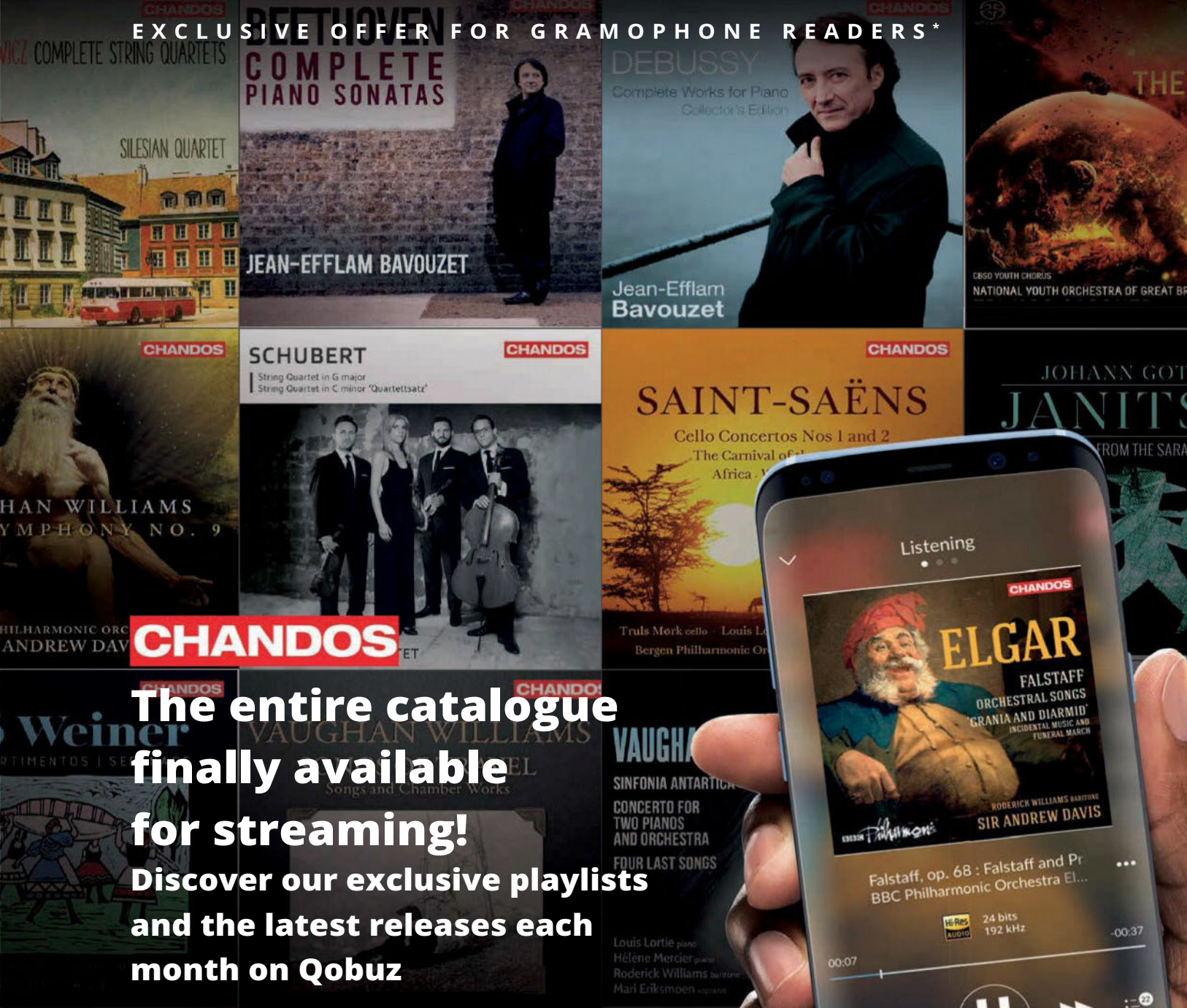
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No. 6, 'Pathétique'
MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis
Sony Classical
► **PETER QUANTRILL'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 30**

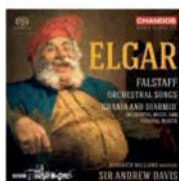
In this extraordinary, vivid *Pathétique*, Teodor Currentzis not only offers an incredibly powerful performance of the work, but also a remarkable showcase of the very art of recording.



BEETHOVEN
Symphonies Nos 1 & 3
Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan
Wiener Symphoniker

An impressive statement of intent from Philippe Jordan as he begins a Beethoven cycle with his Vienna Symphony, on its own label.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 33**



ELGAR *Falstaff*. Songs
Roderick Williams *bar* BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis
Chandos

A *Falstaff* full of personality and perceptiveness, Roderick Williams eloquent in orchestral songs ... just the highlights from a wonderful Elgar anthology from Sir Andrew Davis.

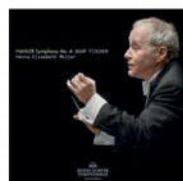
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**



HAYDN. KRAUS
'Symphonies, Vol 5'
Basel Chamber Orchestra / Giovanni Antonini
Alpha

Giovanni Antonini's *Gramophone* Award for his previous Haydn volume set the bar high – and it's met here, on a worthy addition to his compelling exploration of the composer.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 38**



MAHLER
Symphony No 4
Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adam Fischer
AVI-Music

Following his praised recording of the Seventh, Adam Fischer offers us an exploratory Fourth, Mahler's ideas deeply thought through. This could become a superb cycle.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 38**



SAINT-SAËNS Works for Cello and Orchestra
Gabriel Schwabe *vc* Malmö Symphony Orchestra / Marc Soustrot
Naxos

Gabriel Schwabe brings a delightful tone to these concertos: as critic Jeremy Nicholas makes clear, a bargain at Naxos prices, but a brilliant buy regardless.

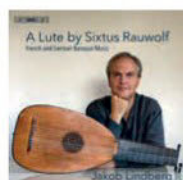
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



KANCHELI. SCHNITTKE
'Light Over Darkness'
Erato Alakiozidou *pf* Lutoslawski Quartet
Odradek

An excellent disc from the innovative Odradek label, musicianship and sound-quality of very high standard making for a grippingly intense chamber experience.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



'A LUTE BY SIXTUS RAUWOLF'
Jakob Lindberg *lute*
BIS

A beautiful Baroque programme, specially compiled to showcase Jakob Lindberg's rather unique instrument – possibly the oldest lute in playing condition (and about which you can learn more on page 12).

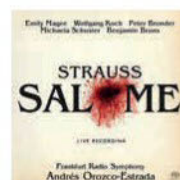
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



'DOLCE DUELLO'
Cecilia Bartoli *mez* Sol Gabetta *vc* Cappella Gabetta / Andrés Gabetta
Decca

Cecilia Bartoli once again delivers a fascinating project, this time in the company of the equally engaging and exploratory musicianship of cellist Sol Gabetta.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



R STRAUSS *Salome*
Sols; Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra / Andrés Orozco-Estrada
Pentatone

'A deeply musical account of the score', writes critic Hugo Shirley of this dramatic telling of Strauss's opera; Emily Magee is a 'compellingly real' *Salome*, and all in excellent sound.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



DVD/BLU-RAY
JS BACH *St Matthew Passion*
Sols; Gächinger Cantorey / Hans-Christoph Rademann
Accentus

An imaginative, inspiring and choreographed approach to Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, movingly performed by players, soloists and 100 children from schools around Stuttgart.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
'THE MARYLA JONAS STORY'
Maryla Jonas *pf*
Sony Classical

As Bryce Morrison puts it: 'a blazingly original talent, heard here in brilliantly remastered sound'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD

Bent Sørensen wins Grawemeyer Award



The recipient of this year's Grawemeyer Award – one of the most prestigious awards given for composition – is the Danish composer Bent Sørensen. The prize was given for his triple concerto *L'isola della Città* ('The Island in the City') for violin, cello and piano. The five-movement work (played through continuously) was written for the Danish ensemble Trio Con Brio and the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, and was premiered in Copenhagen in January 2016.

Describing the work, the composer – who receives \$100,000 as part of the prize – said: 'In all five movements the "island" (the trio) tries to escape the shadows of the orchestra. This is most evident in the last movement, in which the trio ever so silently and without attracting any attention, simply glides away from the orchestra's noisy shadows.'

Gramophone's Andrew Mellor reflected on the work as part of his profile on Sørensen for our Contemporary Composer feature in the August 2016 edition, describing it as 'deafeningly quiet': 'Sørensen hallmarks are all over the piece: a Beethoven fugue drifts in like a ghost passing a window; the entire wind section is asked to play secondary instruments (in this case, "ticking" woodblocks); he's happy to repeat a single pitch at length, forcing his audience to focus on what's to come; and his textures are distilled, perhaps reaching new heights of windblown refinement, in fact.'

The Grawemeyer Awards are given annually by the University of Louisville, and as well as composition there are also awards for ideas improving world order, psychology, education, and religion (the latter jointly awarded with Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

Opera world mourns death of baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky

Dmitri Hvorostovsky, who had been suffering from cancer for two-and-a-half years, died aged 55, on November 22 in London where he'd made his home.

The baritone was born in Siberia, on October 16, 1962, achieving international fame with his victory at the Cardiff Singer of the World competition in 1989 (beating Bryn Terfel) thanks to – as Alan Blyth described it in *Gramophone* shortly after – 'a combination of a warm, steady voice' and 'a command of various styles truly remarkable in a youthful artist'.

Major debuts soon followed and, throughout his career, Hvorostovsky sang at most major opera houses throughout the world, earning great acclaim in works from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* to Verdi's *Il trovatore*.

A highly perceptive tribute to his art came from soprano Renée Fleming when Hvorostovsky was welcomed into the *Gramophone* Hall of Fame in 2014 – admittance to which is in the gift of *Gramophone* readers. 'Besides being a wonderful colleague, Dmitri possesses a voice with a quality of velvet that is both a joy to hear and immediately recognisable,' she told *Gramophone*. 'Dmitri has the best breath control I've ever encountered – his technique is impeccable. He is a consummate musician. Add to this his charisma and committed portrayals, and you have a complete singing artist.'

Hvorostovsky was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2015, and balance issues that this caused led him to announce later that year that he was withdrawing from opera performances for the foreseeable future, though he would continue to give recitals and to record. (His last stage appearance was at the Met in *Il trovatore* in September 2015.) His most recent review in these pages was in our September issue, of Georgy Sviridov's song cycle *Russia Cast Adrift*, described as a perfect vehicle for the baritone's voice, both for his 'power and resonance' and, in more intimate moments, his 'silvery high register' – very

much the hallmarks of the Hvorostovsky sound. Prior to that, in December 2015, his recording on Ondine of settings by Liszt and Shostakovich of Italian poetry was an Editor's Choice and shortlisted for the following year's *Gramophone* Awards.

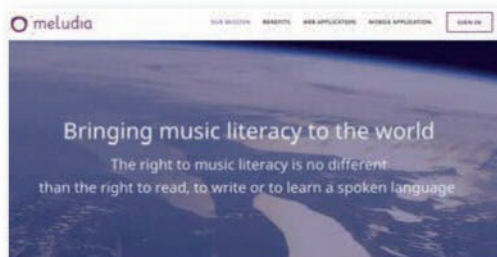
Hvorostovsky leaves behind an impressive discography, which spans the breadth of his repertoire – from song to opera (often in multiple DVD versions); it will remain richly rewarding for all admirers of the artform.



Canada to access online music teaching

The online music learning method Meludia has already been given by Estonia and Malta to their entire populations. To those countries can now be added Canada. The Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra is making the gift to its homeland in recognition and celebration of the nation's 150th anniversary.

Meludia uses a series of immersive exercises to teach musical literacy. Aimed at beginners to advanced-level students, the increasingly complex exercises help with identifying notes, intervals and rhythm. The Canadian initiative is being supported by a roadshow, in which a team from the Paris-based company will



Universal music learning: Meludia comes to Canada

tour Canada, visiting schools, universities, community centres, retirement homes, Alzheimer and dementia centres, hospitals

and prisons. It's hoped that many will now commit the time to Meludia's recommendation of 15 minutes a day for four days per week, which will enable users to progress sufficiently to complete the Advanced level by the end of the year. Meludia is used by over 1500 universities, music schools and conservatories worldwide and by individual users in 168 countries. You can find out more about Meludia in our app feature – see page 28.

ONE TO WATCH

Marc Bouchkov Violinist

This month's One to Watch reaches our pages via a new imprint of a label designed purposefully to champion brilliance among the younger generation.

But first, the artist himself. The violinist Marc Bouchkov, born in 1991, has several prestigious prizes to his name – including the International Violin Contest Henri Koch, the European Young Concert Artists Audition in Leipzig and, in 2013, the Montreal International Musical Competition – and the past few years have seen him perform with a number of major European orchestras.

This issue, however, sees us review his debut disc on the harmonia#nova series. Described by Richard Bratby on page 50 as 'a full-blown love letter to Eugène Ysaÿe', it features two rare *concertante* works by the composer – *Légende norvégienne* and *Fantaisie* – plus two sonatas for violin solo, and then Chausson's *Poème* and a couple of homages to Ysaÿe by Bouchkov himself. 'Bouchkov has an unmistakably Gallic sound – fierce and tight at the top, full-blooded and sultry at the bottom,' writes Bratby, 'and he takes a real delight in Ysaÿe's rapid-fire shifts of musical character.'

Meanwhile, the recently launched imprint harmonia#nova deserves credit for offering Bouchkov, and others in recent months, such



a prominent showcase. It's a reinvention of Harmonia Mundi's 'Les Nouveaux Musiciens' series that ran in the late 1990s, and which helped launch the career of such illustrious artists as the pianist Alexandre Tharaud, the violinist Isabelle Faust and the cellist Emmanuelle Bertrand. HM hopes to release five to eight new releases on this imprint every year and, if this album is anything to go by, the label could very well prove to be a 'one to watch' all by itself.

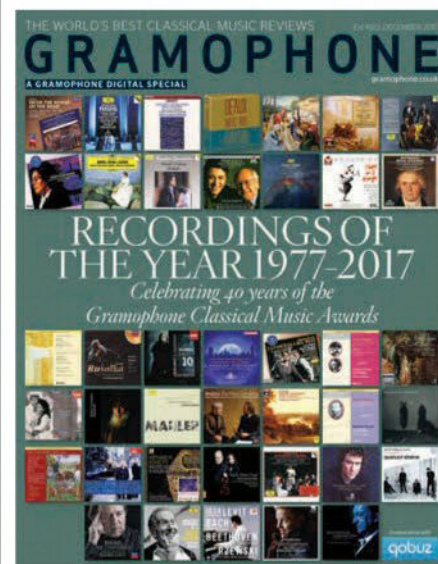
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We have produced a very special free digital magazine to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the *Gramophone* Awards. The magazine features full reviews of each of the albums to win the top prize, the coveted Recording of the Year, since 1977.

We're often asked which recordings are 'essential', those which should be part of any classical record collection. With the extraordinary wealth of great recordings



produced over the last century, it's almost an impossible question to answer, but the recordings in this digital magazine would form a collection that would provide several years of compelling listening. From Karajan, Rattle and Abbado in astonishing accounts of Mahler's symphonies, to the wondrous pianism of Igor Levit, Paul Lewis, Nelson Freire and Krystian Zimerman, and exquisite chamber music from the Beaux Arts Trio and the Emerson, Pavel Haas and Ébène string quartets, *Gramophone's* reviewers give deep insights and colourful descriptions of each of the albums to guide you to your next favourite recording. Visit the *Gramophone* website to find out more.

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IN THE STUDIO

Pianist **Nicholas Angelich** will venture to La Seine Musicale, Paris, in March 2018 to record Beethoven piano concertos for Warner Classics. He'll be joined by Laurence Equilbey and her Insula Orchestra, and the result will be released in September ● **Kyung Wha Chung** heads to Rome in February for a live recording of Brahms's Violin Concerto with

Sir Antonio Pappano and his Santa Cecilia orchestra. The recording will be released later in 2018, again on Warner Classics ● **Sakari Oramo** and the BBC Symphony Orchestra were at the Watford Colosseum in October for Oramo's first Chandos recording: the First and Second Suites from Florent Schmitt's *Antoine et Cléopâtre* (due out in March).

STUDIO FOCUS *Kirill Karabits*

The conductor on his live recording of Prokofiev's Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution

The 20th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1937 triggered many patriotic works, including this one ...

One could say this is a propaganda piece but at the same time there's truth in it. While Prokofiev had to make compromises – he originally used only text by Lenin, but was then told to add words by Stalin too – he still remained true to himself. He is praising a new type of man born after the revolution, and he is saying that society will be forever changed. He really believes this, and you can hear it in the music.



But the work wasn't performed as part of the celebrations ...

The authorities wanted something straightforward and secure, and this wasn't – no one could predict how people would react to it. It's so overwhelming and strong – it's a masterpiece rather than something that praises the Communist Party.

How did you come to record it?

It wasn't planned as a recording. My main motivation was to perform it. With 2017 being the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution, I said to myself, if I were ever to conduct it, now is the moment. The Kunstfest Weimar like unusual projects so

Multi-talented: Karabits conducts and declaims on his new Prokofiev recording

I had the idea to present two Prokofievs in one of their concerts last summer – this work, alongside Gabriel Prokofiev's *Concerto for Turntables*. Then Deutschlandradio in Berlin heard about it and wanted to do a broadcast. So then we talked to Audite and they said they'd love to release the recording.

How challenging was it to perform/record?

The selection of voices and instruments Prokofiev uses is extraordinary – there's a huge orchestra, an accordion ensemble, a large choir, a military band with extra percussion ... With around 200 performers

in total, we couldn't all fit on the stage so we had to use part of the hall as well. It was also an extraordinary task for the radio people to record it. They recorded our first rehearsal and also the general rehearsal so, while most of the material on the recording is from the live performance, they had enough extra material to choose from.

Tell us about the gunshots and the megaphone ...

It wasn't a real gun but it looked like one, so we had to warn the audience to stay calm. And I got to imitate Lenin by speaking his words into a megaphone ... It wasn't easy to do because I had to turn to the audience

while carrying on conducting! It was all very theatrical, but that's what Prokofiev wanted.

How involved were you in the editing?

They sent me the final edit, I listened carefully and gave back my comments. I'm very pleased with the end result. I wasn't compromising as a conductor just because I knew it was being recorded. It's a fantastic document of an extraordinary concert – we'll probably have to wait another 100 years for another performance!

The recording, on Audite, is released in the UK on February 16 and will be reviewed next issue



The JF Club offers exclusive content to its members

Get closer to Julia Fischer via the JF Club

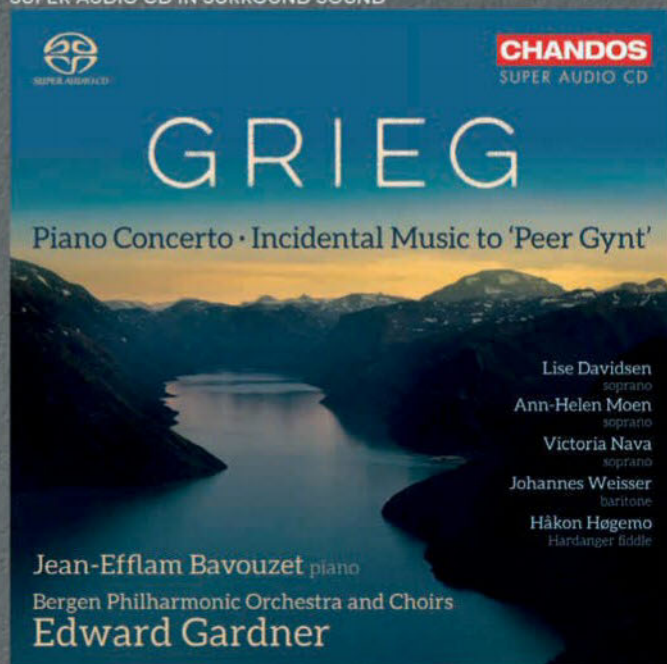
Acclaimed violinist Julia Fischer is reaching out to new audiences via her own online music platform. The JF Club at **jfclub.de** allows paying members (5 Euros per month/50 Euros per year) to listen to Fischer's recordings and read editorial she has written, and also gives them the chance to attend rehearsals and meet the violinist after concerts.

The website is divided into four areas: Listen, Read, Watch and Meet. To kick things off, Fischer has recorded Ysaÿe's Six Solo Violin Sonatas, as well as music by composers who inspired Ysaÿe – all available to stream in CD quality. 'With my club, I am trying to fill a new, younger audience with enthusiasm for classical music,' said Fischer.

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Disc of the Month

GRIEG

PIANO CONCERTO

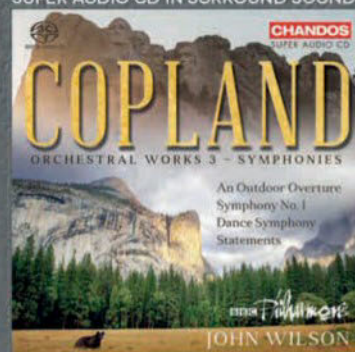
INCIDENTAL MUSIC TO 'PEER GYNT'

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet | Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra | Edward Gardner

Keenly idiomatic performances of the most famous works by Grieg with extensive vocal and orchestral excerpts from *Peer Gynt* as well as a brilliant, yet deeply tender interpretation of the Piano Concerto creating 83 minutes of sheer indulgence.

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COPLAND

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BBC Philharmonic | John Wilson

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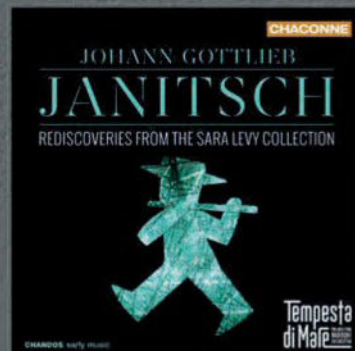
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

SONGS OF TRAVEL

James Gilchrist | Philip Dukes
Anna Tilbrook

Champions of British repertoire again join in this lyrical journey through some of Vaughan Williams's best songs and rarely heard chamber works.

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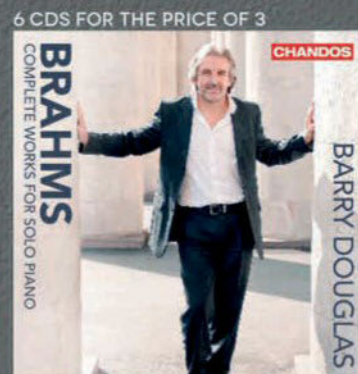
JANITSCH

REDISCOVERIES FROM THE SARA LEVY COLLECTION

Tempesta di Mare

An unparalleled musical legacy, confined for centuries to unexamined archives, uncovered by the Philadelphia-based baroque orchestra.

CHAN 0820



BRAHMS

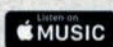
COMPLETE WORKS FOR SOLO PIANO

Barry Douglas

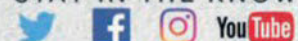
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ARTISTS & THEIR INSTRUMENTS

Jakob Lindberg on his precious 16th-century Sixtus Rauwolf lute



changed to keep up with the times. It has its original soundboard – we can confirm through dendrochronology that the tree from which it was made dates from 1418 to 1560 (they can be that precise!) – and that's extremely rare. I'm not aware of another instrument that has both back and soundboard in playing condition that is that old.

A lute soundboard is extremely thin, so in order for it to withstand the tension it has bars underneath to strengthen it. These were also altered at various points in this particular lute's history and although some of the bars are in fact original, some have been modernised. But we were very keen to try not to add modern wood when we were restoring the instrument. I was very fortunate in getting hold of some wood from Palazzo Pitti – they were changing some of their bookshelves, and so

“It was made in Augsburg in the 1590s by a prolific maker called Sixtus Rauwolf, and it was probably initially a seven- or eight-course lute. We don't know for whom – it's not a luxury model, but it's a sort of professional model. You often find in lutes of the old times that you have some very ornate instruments made for rich patrons, and then you have these simpler models which were probably working musicians' instruments.

The history of the lute is a very complicated one. It arrived from the Arab world in Medieval times, and then in Europe it changed technique from plectrum to finger-playing, and kept having strings added to it. So by the early 18th century lutes had as many as 11 double strings on them, and in order to play the repertoire they needed a wider neck. And that's what happened to this lute in 1715 – it was simply modified from a Renaissance lute to a Baroque lute. It happened to many lutes which were of good quality – they were

I was actually able to buy some wood from the 16th century. So all the new bits of wood are actually old bits!

I find the sound of the Rauwolf particularly subtle. It has what I've always been after in a lute, which is clarity on the one hand (where you can hear the different voices clearly) and also a beautiful sustain, and that's quite hard to get on a lute – so that is why I love it. But of course when travelling it's quite scary really because it's so sensitive to humidity. I do love recording on it, though. When it was newly restored I did travel with it quite a bit, but I always carried a hygrometer with me and sometimes it was simply too dry in the concert halls and they had to organise all sorts of humidification. It was complicated, and so now I tend to travel with other instruments – I've got marvelous lutes from English makers that I'm very pleased with. But this Rauwolf lute has just got an extra dimension.”

Lindberg's 'A Lute by Sixtus Rauwolf' (BIS) is reviewed on page 67

Rob Cowan plays the Classics

Gramophone critic and 'Replay' author Rob Cowan has joined the Classic FM presenter team where, from January 6, he'll be hosting a primetime show, 'Cowan's Classics', every Saturday from 7-9pm. For Rob, it marks a welcome return to the station (which received a Special Anniversary Award at the 2017 *Gramophone* Awards), having last presented there in 2001, before moving to BBC Radio 3.

Idagio partners with Vienna Phil

Classical-specific streaming service Idagio has launched a new partnership with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra to release exclusively some new live recordings. The series launches with the

farewell concert of the orchestra's solo flute player, Dieter Flury – who was in the post from 1981 to 2017. It was recorded at a concert in Vienna's Musikverein on July 11 last year, conducted by Christian Thielemann. Repertoire includes Jörg Widmann's *Flûte en suite* and Bach's Partita for solo flute. The series will be made available to subscribers of Idagio.

Sony signs Anita Rachvelishvili

Sony Classical has signed the Georgian mezzo Anita Rachvelishvili. She first achieved fame in 2009 when Daniel Barenboim chose her to open the La Scala season in a new production of *Carmen* with Jonas Kaufmann as Don José – excerpts from the role will feature on the debut disc, due out in March.

FROM WHERE I SIT

What is it with conductors who refuse to take Mahler at his word? asks Edward Seckerson



Reviewing Daniele Gatti's new recording of Mahler's Second Symphony last month, I found myself questioning yet again how it is possible to keep this now-familiar music sounding startling and fresh and at the very edge of possibility when great orchestras have the facility, the virtuosity, to make light of its super-challenging demands. The Classical and Early Music repertoire returned to instruments of their respective periods to rekindle that 'shock of newness'. But Mahler was effectively already writing for a 21st-century orchestra when he reimagined the symphony. Above and beyond their sonic demands, it still behoves Mahler's interpreters to heed his very explicit directions and never short-change him. It cannot be said often enough that he must be taken at his word.

I remember a rather distinguished conductor once saying to me in an interview that he believed Mahler's excesses required tempering, that certain 'awkwardnesses' (the word he used) relating to his wildest fluctuations of tempo and dynamics needed a degree of adjustment to make them practicable and credible. But Mahler traded in the incredible. He took all the trappings of 18th- and 19th-century Austro-German music and pushed them to the *nth* degree. Everything was writ large, larger, largest. The sound of silence and the threshold of pain were achieved in dynamics, accelerandos were reckless sprints to the cliff edge, ritardandos anticipated hugely rhetorical pronouncements, general pauses opened up great chasms in the superstructure. The drama was, and still is, in the excess.

But the conductor not mentioned by name above was far from being alone in his misapprehension. In what is generally regarded as a landmark recording of the Second Symphony, no less a figure than Otto Klemperer fashions an account where the all-important first movement chooses largely to ignore Mahler's huge diversity of tempi and the drama ignited therein. Klemperer's first movement is pretty much one tempo with Mahler's strategically planted tactical shocks all but ironed out. And yet Klemperer conducted the offstage band in one of Mahler's own performances of the Second. You'd have expected something that came directly from the horse's mouth. Wouldn't you?

In a subsequent conversation I had with Riccardo Chailly about this contentious first movement he made the very valid point that its first draft – *Totenfeier* (which Klemperer will have seen) – is devoid of instruction. Was Klemperer taking his cues from that? Perhaps. But the real drama resides in the very specific directions that Mahler added to the finished movement. There is that monstrous pile-up at the climax of the development which is chronicled to accelerate into a battering sequence of dissonant chords. If you know the piece you'll know the place. There is no ritardando into that chord sequence (as most conductors instinctively apply) but a sudden and crushing *molto pesante* which by its very weight should grind the tempo almost to a halt. Taken literally – as only one or two in my experience have – the effect is jaw-dropping. As I say, it's all about taking Mahler at his word.

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Keeping it in THE FAMILY

With Neeme Järvi having just turned 80 and Estonia marking its centenary, James Jolly seizes the chance to meet Neeme and his sons Paavo and Kristjan – their country's finest conducting exports

For many years, there has been one item on *Gramophone's* 'to do' list: talk conducting with the Järvi family – Neeme and his sons, Paavo and Kristjan; not individually, but all together. For the past few years, diaries – the three maintain pretty hair-raising schedules – have stood in the way. But last summer, the stars were in alignment, the omens were good, and all three were gathered in the same place, Tallinn, the capital of Estonia – a country which, this year, marks its 100th anniversary. Such a milestone is being celebrated in an all-embracing 'Estonia 100' initiative which is attracting many visitors to this small but dynamic Baltic nation.

Neeme is now Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra (a role he previously held from 1963 to 1979), and he resides in Tallinn. Around the time of our interview, he was working with student orchestras as part of the Järvi Academy, while Paavo had been conducting his recently formed (in 2011) Estonian Festival Orchestra in nearby Pärnu; he was also spending time in Tallinn with his father's orchestra, of which he's Artistic Adviser, recording a selection of Arvo Pärt's music with Viktoria Mullova for Onyx (due out this autumn), as well as giving conducting masterclasses. As for Kristjan, he works regularly in Estonia and happened to be in town for a few days.

The setting for our conversation was rich with nostalgia. We sat down in the studio where the acclaimed young Estonian photographer Kaupo Kikkas works and which happens to be inside the building that, back in Soviet times, was Tallinn's official 'House of Composers' where composers would live and work. It was there – once the red tape had been cut to allow a conductor to move in – that the Järvi family lived and where Paavo was raised. It stirred many memories for Neeme who, with his laconic wit, was provoked to dig deep into the past.

Neeme was on fine form and both Paavo and Kristjan were clearly deeply respectful of their father; he, in turn, was palpably proud of what they have achieved. But the Järvi conducting dynasty actually stretches back further than the current trinity. And that's where we started our conversation ...

Neeme My brother, Vallo – he was 13 years older than me – was very active as a conductor. He was a percussionist first and then a

conductor – exactly like me. Everything he did, I did afterwards – my mother was a strong lady and she always said, 'Vallo has done that. You have to do it too!' Vallo was a conductor of Theatre Estonia and conducted all the opera and ballet repertoire in

the country. He didn't travel outside Estonia (these were Soviet times) but he was a hard worker and a good conductor – I learned a lot from him. Once I was playing the xylophone for him in *Eine*

Nacht in Venedig by Strauss, and I knew the piece well, so I said, 'Let me conduct!' – and so I did. And in the same concert there was the Khachaturian Violin Concerto, which I played on the xylophone with Vallo conducting – so that was my second outing in the same concert! It was such fun ...

Paavo ... and it was an old-fashioned xylophone, too!

Neeme I'd played it since I was four-years old – it was my first profession. Then I went to the Leningrad Conservatoire. It was about the same time that the Berlin Philharmonic/Karl Böhm Mozart symphony set came out on DG and we listened to it every day. Kristjan was about three and wasn't really speaking yet. One day he was messing around behind one of the loudspeakers – one of those big old-fashioned ones – and it fell over onto him. He came rushing in, pointing to his head and crying, 'Mozart!' That was pretty typical of our family life (and still now, if anyone hurts his head, we point and cry 'Mozart!').

James Was there ever a suggestion that Paavo or Kristjan might do something other than conducting?

Paavo Never! I never wanted to be anything else – I think I wanted to be like my father, basically! It wasn't so much that I wanted to be a conductor but more that I looked at my father and he was having so much joy that I wanted to do it too. It was never a case of, 'Let's do something else'.

Kristjan For me, it was about everything *except* conducting. I used to think, 'Vallo, Neeme, Paavo ... Kristjan. No, three is probably enough!' Also, I didn't feel like it would be a business, as it were, that could accommodate so many from the same family doing the same thing. Of course, times were different for each of us. When

I got to America I thought, 'Wow. There are so many things I could do'. And so it's kind of a miracle that I became a conductor – and that's all thanks to my piano teacher Nina Svetlanova who actually insisted on the Manhattan School of Music. She said, 'Just try it for two years and if you don't like it, then do something else.' And two years turned into four years, and four years turned into six years. Then things developed – I started having conducting lessons, then I started Absolute Ensemble and went to university in Michigan, and then I got the position as Esa-Pekka Salonen's assistant in LA and then ... [Paavo interjects: 'There was no way out!'] It was kind of like quick sand.

Neeme The percussionists at the Opera used to drink quite a lot! Once, we were doing Glière's ballet *The Red Poppy* – a very popular piece at the time. There's one section where all four percussionists play and I looked round and no one from my section was there. So I took all the parts myself, playing with my hands, my legs, my feet, with everything I could. Luckily I knew the piece!

When it was over, the other percussionists returned and asked me, 'So where are we?' 'It's already passed,' was my answer! I also used to play four-hand piano music with my brother – Haydn, Mozart ... Everything went wrong,

but we didn't stop! We didn't care about wrong notes – it was the lines we were after. But thanks to a percussionist's training, you get a feel for rhythms. And the rhythms are really important in a conductor's life; to lead things, to catch the pulsation of the piece.

Paavo It's funny but when we have the students here for the Academy, the weakest thing is the rhythm. I find, in general – and it's a strange thing – that the rhythm's lacking. It's not a question of not being able to count difficult rhythms but the basic sense of rhythmic pulse. They stop the orchestra and say 'You're late' but they're not feeling the basic pulse themselves.

Kristjan When we're talking about rhythm, we're not talking about Morse code; we're talking about actually how you rhythmically convey a phrase that has an anchor and which leads logically to another phrase. Rock bands have a groove – you can just feel it.

With the really good ones you can just feel there is something that's so in the right place.

Neeme Kristjan's fanaticism comes from the rhythms. He has the Absolute Ensemble which he





created. It's a fantastic group. If you hear them – and personally I don't very much like this kind of stuff! – there's an amazingly tight sense of rhythm. It is such a wonderful thing to hear rhythms that are so tight. It's so not my world, but it's very impressive.

James People on the outside often have this idea that the conductor just stands up and performs some kind of magic. Are they imposing, or steering, or are they enabling?

Paavo I think that unless you are actually a conductor yourself, you don't really, truly, understand what goes on between the players and the conductor. There is some kind of chemistry. The orchestra plays and good music is made, and it has nothing to do with logistics, nothing to do with helping the players through a complicated passage. Sometimes you see someone who appears to be all over the place and when the players look up they don't seem to understand anything, but somehow, something happens. Then there are people who are all organised and precise and *nothing* happens! And then there is everything in between. It's a very tricky thing.

Neeme Rimsky-Korsakov said the conductor's profession is a murky business. And it is. There aren't exactly rules. It depends on so much: what kind of personality you are; what kind of leader you are; what kind of strong man you are; what kind of technician you are. But you need talent first – you can be a very good technician but you need talent too. It's such a strange combination. You can have a strong personality and image but if you don't look welcoming it doesn't work. You need an artistic presence and that must be conveyed in your gestures. You need to be helpful to the orchestra though your eyes, your arms, your elbows, your wrists. But if you don't have any *ideas* then you can't be a conductor. You have to inspire.

Kristjan I have to add here that my father hardly ever moves when he conducts.

James Is that not something that comes with age? As conductors reach their prime, they hardly move at all.

Paavo Because they don't need to. They've got all that stuff done.

Neeme If a conductor waves his arms about, the audience thinks he's working hard but he's probably just disturbing the musicians!

Kristjan There are different factors. He's 80 and I'm half his age and that also makes a difference. Not just in terms of knowledge and experience, but in the fact that there's a certain built-in respect, no matter what. But the most incredible thing to learn from him, and also when I see him teach, is that it is the most subtle, genuine and intuitive form of communication when you can actually assess and *feel* each other through small gestures and glances. You get such an amazing result – one that is so hard to explain in words. You reach such a level of understanding and honesty that words aren't needed. That's the most wonderful thing I see when my father conducts. He doesn't need to show or prove anything. It's a miraculous result with hardly any effort. That's true virtuosity.

Paavo Barenboim said to me the other day, 'You know, your father is liked by every orchestral musician that I know. Why is it?' 'Because he's very good!' It was interesting because Barenboim travels around a lot, performing with many different orchestras. Every orchestral musician likes our father – I know this too because whenever I guest-conduct they all come up to me and ask me: 'How is your father? We've not seen each other for a while.' It's because it's organic. He's real. If you don't connect with your players, it doesn't work.

Neeme Conducting is something like an artist's work, like drawing. You draw a line, you follow the pencil, you go there, you finish beautifully. It is exactly the same thing in music. You're drawing naked lines, phrases. What's missing? Ideas! The main thing is, 'How do I do this?', not, 'I already know how to do this because my plan is quite clear, I know how I'm going to make this phrase go there, and so on'. That's phrasing – where I want to go, from here to here and there to there. And that's what engages the ideas, how to trace this movement. I reach that place with successful lines. You're drawing with a stick and the players are following you immediately.

Paavo Yesterday in a masterclass we saw some young people conducting. We had a very good Russian guy and it was so obvious that he just loved it so much – and it totally worked. And then another person conducted and you felt that he wasn't connected to the music at all. And he'd say, 'I started pushing here because he writes *accelerando* at this point.' 'Yes, but how do you get to that point? And why?' [Neeme interjects: 'Musicianship!'] But that first person simply just did it. Everyone felt his unbelievable love for the music. He forgot he had to look one way or another. He was just willing everyone on.

Neeme It's such a joy, and people perceive this joy. If you don't have any ideas, or have just heard the music formulaically or bar by bar, or say that 'the composer has written it like this', it's no good ... The composer doesn't know anything about that. We have to try and find what the composer wanted. Take Glazunov: if you look at the music on the page, it's all boring, but if you start to conduct it and bring your ideas, it's not boring at all.

Kristjan It's not that the composer doesn't know anything. That's not what my father is trying to say. The composers *do* know what they want – but they also change their minds. We work with living composers all the time.

Paavo Take Arvo Pärt, which we're recording at the moment. Vika Mullova shows up with a metronome and the marking says '80'. And I say, 'No, that's way too fast', and we do the whole thing at 40 because it sounds so much better! That happens all the time with Pärt.

Kristjan And on the spot, too. Music happens on the spot, not on the page. If something is convincing, then it works.

James The thing that sets you all apart from so many conductors is your insatiable appetite for repertoire, both old and new. Both Neeme and Paavo in particular have recorded dozens of pieces which have added enormously to the catalogue. What drives your approach to programming, particularly with respect to the rich musical heritage of Estonia?

Paavo When you grow up in a country like this, and with a father like this, there's a certain sense of a mission, a mission to introduce Estonian composers outside Estonia. Then there is always a system of priorities because if you're a music director in Germany you have composers that the German orchestras expect their music director to play – so when I was in Frankfurt I did a lot of German composers like Jörg Widmann, Peter Ruzicka and many others. But if you guest-conduct and you don't feel you have a responsibility to a local orchestra, then, if you are given a choice to do a new piece, I always – as a matter of principle – choose an Estonian piece. So, for example, we were at the BBC Proms recently and we did an Erkki-Sven Tüür work [*Flamma*]. There are many great German and British composers, but as I am an Estonian it's my duty to champion Estonian composers because we don't have so many people to introduce our music. So if I were to go to Cleveland or Chicago and they asked, 'Would you like to do a John Adams piece or an Erkki-Sven Tüür piece?', I would do the Tüür because nobody else would do it.

James And you, Kristjan, grew up in the US. Do you see yourself as much an American as an Estonian? How deep do your roots go?

Kristjan When people use the word 'culture', that's basically identity. I identify with the fact that my home is Estonia but that I grew up in America and that country gave me a lot. Of course, the word 'culture' means very different things to different people. It can mean opera for one, to another a sports event, but for us Estonians it's our geography, it's our agriculture, it's our architecture, our design, music, dance, literature, and that's what creates this family of Estonians, since we not so many. Paavo said that when he has a choice to programme something like Erkki-Sven Tüür or Adams, he would programme Tüür



Paavo Järvi, Dmitri Chostakovich & Neeme Järvi © Gustav Ernesaks

Paavo Järvi is the director of the Pärnu Festival which takes place each summer, bringing together the finest Estonian musicians and the cream of European orchestral players for a series of vivid concerts on the shores of the Baltic: 'magical and incredibly appealing' wrote *Die Welt*. For their first recording Järvi has chosen Shostakovich, a key figure of the twentieth century and a composer whom Paavo met in Pärnu as a child - a moment for ever etched on his memory.



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... Well, I don't think there's an orchestra in Germany that's played more Estonian music than the MDR Radio Symphony Orchestra [of which Kristjan is Music Director]. But I've also tried to have Estonian performers and soloists, not only in the classical genre but incredible folk artists and jazz musicians too. We played Eduard Tubin within a concept called 'Baltic Folk' where we had Tubin played by this Estonian folk violinist but also on an electric violin. It took Tubin's folk music into a completely modern, 'electro' setting which isn't jazz but is totally contemporary – 'urban folk' perhaps. And we were also introducing an old Estonian classical symphonist who people might not know through a genre which is very much in vogue these days, complete with a symphony orchestra.

Neeme We're now in Estonia, a small country with a lot of wonderful composers. But as conductors we need to know the music of the world. We don't need to know only Mahler and Bruckner or Beethoven. I personally need more. I was, for 24 years, Principal Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Sweden's national orchestra, and we did so much there. What an interesting story they have: their second Principal Conductor was [the pianist, composer and conductor] Wilhelm Stenhammar, his good friend was Sibelius, Nielsen was a guest conductor there, and they all worked together in Gothenburg. Yet even today, people are still asking me, 'Where is Gothenburg?'

Paavo But, because of you, they probably know it better!

Neeme It's important to engage with the culture of your orchestra's country. So, with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and also the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, we did a lot of Swedish music. We made the first Stenhammar recordings and recorded the orchestral works of Hugo Alfvén, and now I've just finished the first complete set of symphonies by Kurt Atterberg, who I think is one of the greatest of all Swedish composers. Completely forgotten! The *Dollar* Symphony was first conducted by Toscanini, and Beecham also did it – it's a wonderful piece. It was written as an attempt to finish the *Unfinished* Symphony by Schubert.

Kristjan Here's an interesting fact: for all of us, our first conducting positions since leaving Estonia have all been in Sweden.

Neeme Yes, Paavo was Chief Conductor of the Malmö Symphony Orchestra and then Principal Guest Conductor of

the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, and Kristjan was Chief Conductor of the NorrlandsOperan. And what is Sweden, to us, all about? Once upon a time everything belonged to Sweden, even Estonia was under Sweden – Norway was, Denmark was, Finland was, and even in the Tsar's time there was Swedish influence. So when I arrived in Gothenburg we did 19 discs for the BIS record label, including the Sibelius symphonies. Every Swedish musician knows Sibelius is a Swedish composer! Sibelius spoke Swedish at home. Finnish speakers were in the minority. Now of course all the conductors who come from Finland only ever conduct Sibelius, almost nothing else that's Finnish. There are a lot of wonderful Finnish composers – Uno Klami, Leevi Madetoja, Erkki Melartin – but the world doesn't know about them. They need to be more available. Actually, talking of Sibelius, I have to tell a story. Paavo was conducting the *Kullervo* Symphony with the Stockholm Philharmonic. The fourth movement, in five, goes very quickly, and suddenly his baton flew out of his hand. A double bass player picked it up – Paavo saw he'd got it and signalled to him to give it back. So the double bass player throws it – Paavo is conducting away in five – and he reaches up and catches it and continues conducting. Where is CNN when you need it? [Paavo: 'That's a clip that would have gone viral!']

James Neeme, you've recorded the music of neglected composers from beyond Sweden, too ...

Neeme Yes, I then went to Norway and did recordings of Johan Halvorsen and Johan Svendsen – marvellous music! And then to Denmark for Rued Langgaard and of course Carl Nielsen. It is such a wonderful area for music. Then there's the Hungarian music of Leó Weiner – who is Leó Weiner? My record of the *Divertimentos Nos 1-5* and the *Serenade* has just come out on Chandos [11/17]. And then there's Romanian music, Bulgarian music, Polish music ...

So, my message is, 'Don't always play the same music, find the good stuff that people *don't* know'. That's why I really admire what Paavo has done by recording all that great music. He has done mainstream – in Cincinnati he did everything that needed to be done – but he has also created a new approach to Beethoven with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and at a time when it's already been done hundreds of different ways. And now it's the symphonies and orchestral works of Brahms ... It's a love story with that orchestra!

I've been incredibly lucky with my record companies and we've done some great work together – BIS at the start and then Chandos; from Brian Couzens to Ralph Couzens, Chandos

is one of the greatest British companies that still survives!

James When you go to guest-conduct an orchestra in its own native music, how does the equation work between what you bring and what they bring?

Paavo It's interesting that if you go to France and you play French music it's obvious that there are certain things that they just know. I've learned a lot of things from the Orchestre de Paris especially with pieces like *La valse*. I thought I knew that piece very well, but there were certain little things they did that were kind of amazing. Then again, sometimes they have a kind of tradition that makes no sense at all, but they've always done it. And you say, 'I know you think you know it, but I don't hear it that way.' 'But we're a French orchestra, we know how it's played ...' And so, if you have a relationship with an orchestra, you undo that tradition.

James But the Orchestre de Paris is not an old orchestra, it only goes back to the 1970s ...

Paavo True, but they believe, for real, that they premiered the *Symphonie fantastique* with Berlioz conducting because somehow they've traced their origins back to the Conservatoire orchestra. It is a little bit of myth-making, but when they play *Symphonie fantastique* you just feel – in comparison to any other orchestra you may conduct – that something unique is happening.

Neeme They're taught in the Conservatoire, 'This is how you do it'. [Kristjan: 'And they play Beethoven in a very French way too!']

James How do orchestras retain a personality down the generations? The Cleveland Orchestra, for example, is still recognisable as George Szell's orchestra all these years later ...

Kristjan That's like the Vienna Philharmonic, but there are very few orchestras in the world like that.

Paavo Well, the Czech Philharmonic still sounds like the Czech Philharmonic!

Kristjan That's an incredible orchestra – probably one of the best orchestras which has that type of tradition. But mostly it is through a certain cultural identification – a pride.

James Is it a flip side of the easy dissemination of music that orchestras now sound very similar and no longer have the immediately identifiable personalities that they once had?

Paavo It's because the world is so much more cosmopolitan: in the Berlin Philharmonic you've a French flautist, an English oboist and, among the double basses, an Australian and two Finns.

Neeme One problem with orchestras is when the chief conductor changes every four years. It has to start from nowhere each time. Take Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, they lived together for over 25 years – here was a conductor



Facing the music: the three Järvis talk to Gramophone's Editor-in-Chief James Jolly

who asked for his wishes every day when he came to his orchestra. He created his style and his repertoire, and it was always great because professionally it was at such a high level. There was a George Szell sound. There was a Mravinsky sound. It comes from working with an orchestra for a long time and making them a highly professional ensemble.

James Szell, Reiner and others were legendary for their dictatorial style. The musicians were terrified of them, yet the results speak for themselves ... That couldn't happen today.

Paavo No, of course not. Well, in North Korea perhaps! [Neeme: 'You can't do terror nowadays.']

Kristjan Governance of conductors is very like governance at the state level. Yes, dictators get amazing results. But at the same time you can empower the people and lead them, not actually govern them but direct them. And that's how we all work, not by terror. Orchestras are just small nations.

Neeme In Leningrad, I'd listen to Yevgeny Mravinsky, Kurt Sanderling and Arvīds Jansons (Mariss's father). I remember being in the hall for the first performance of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, and also for the first time that Mravinsky conducted an accompaniment – for David Oistrakh – in the Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1. [Paavo: 'A "real" conductor didn't do accompanying back then!'] And there were always six rehearsals for every programme. Then the Krushchev era arrived and we had a visit from the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra came with Charles Munch and Pierre Monteux. And then Ormandy came with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Then Stokowski came to conduct the Leningrad Philharmonic. I went up to him and said, 'We're students and we'd really love to come to your rehearsals but they won't let us. Can you help?' The director of the orchestra, who was a very strong man, said 'No!' They went in and shut the door on us. We waited a few minutes, then the door opened and we were all summoned in. Stokowski had insisted we be allowed to come in and as soon as he said this the director became a weak man and gave in! We entered and Stokowski had reseeded the entire orchestra – completely rebuilt it! All the winds were to the right, all the strings to the left, and the double basses were in the middle on risers, facing into the hall – normally the orchestra played on the flat. And Stokowski came in, didn't say a word but started conducting [Neeme sings the *Tristan* Prelude]. It was amazing. I remember shaking hands with Stokowski and he wore white gloves which he never took off. You learn a lot from seeing these great conductors. Nowadays, the opportunities that I had simply don't exist. It was a very special time. **G**

► Paavo Järvi's recording of Brahms's Second Symphony is reviewed on page 36; his recordings of Shostakovich's Sixth with the Estonian Festival Orchestra (Alpha) and Hindemith with the Frankfurt RSO (Naïve) are also out this month. Kristjan Järvi conducts a Rautavaara, Ravel and Szymanowski album with Anne Akiko Meyers on Avie – see review on page 40. Explore our all-Järvi playlist on page 99.



INHABITING LULLY'S *opulent grandeur*

With Les Talens Lyriques, Christophe Rousset has been exploring Lully's operas – most recently *Alceste*, which he has recorded and performed at Versailles. Richard Lawrence went to meet him

Some 20 miles north of Paris, at Asnières-sur-Oise, lies the Abbey of Royaumont. Founded by Louis IX in 1228, it is now the home of the Royaumont Foundation, a privately endowed enterprise that, among other things, supports residential courses and mounts public concerts. It is also a research centre and houses an impressive archive of

French music, based on the collection of manuscripts and scores once belonging to the pianist François Lang. Not much is left of the church, but the abbey buildings have been beautifully restored, and it is in the monks' refectory (which surprisingly contains a Cavaillé-Coll organ) that I heard, in October, an abridged concert performance of Stefano Landi's *La morte d'Orfeo*.



Christophe Rousset and his Les Talens Lyriques in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles

This is the culmination of a study week during which Christophe Rousset worked with a group of young professional singers and players. Teaching and training play an important part in his life, but Rousset is best known as a conductor and harpsichordist. In the café, a trolley of crockery clanking to and fro, I asked him how it all began. After studying in The Hague, where he seems to have been not entirely happy, he entered the international harpsichord competition in Bruges. 'Winning that competition in 1983 was quite something', he recalls, 'as the first prize had been awarded only once before, to Scott Ross in 1971.' Back in Paris, he waited expectantly for the telephone to ring. After what sounds like a lean period he started playing for William Christie's Les Arts Florissants; he also performed concertos with Christopher Hogwood, the founder of the Academy of Ancient Music, who surprised him by saying, 'You are going to be a conductor'. At the time, admits Rousset, 'I really didn't have that idea in mind, because I loved playing continuo. I come from Aix-en-Provence, the summer opera there was important in my youth, and my dream was to be part of it. And with Les Arts Florissants I was involved in opera, which was exactly what I wanted. I had a parallel career as a soloist, when, for

instance, I recorded the Rameau solo pieces for L'Oiseau-Lyre. So I was very happy with that.'

But William Christie made him his assistant, an appointment that culminated in his conducting *La Fée Urgèle* by Duni and Favart (1765) at the Opéra-Comique. Then there was some sort of a falling-out: I didn't ask Rousset about this, but it's mentioned in a fascinating book of interviews with him, *L'Impression que l'instrument chante*, published by the Cité de la Musique-Philharmonie de Paris. The upshot was that in the same year, 1991, Rousset set up his own group, Les Talens Lyriques. 'Since then I haven't played continuo for other people,' he says. 'I'm involved in my group and in my solo career as well. I do some teaching and research, but it's mostly conducting.' He conducts other groups, too: last June, for instance, he was at Covent Garden for Mozart's *Mitridate*, and later in October he was to conduct the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in Handel's *Semele*.

'I have nothing against modernity and I admire directors who reflect their own time: it's interesting for today's audiences'

'I wanted to do something different from the other groups', he continues, 'so my goal was to do mostly Italian repertoire, especially from the Naples school. I recorded a few pieces, including Jommelli's *Armida abbandonata* (Ambrosie, 02/06) and Traetta's *Antigona* (L'Oiseau-Lyre, 03/01). Then I saw that William Christie was doing Mozart and a lot of Handel and so on, and less French music, so I moved on to Lully. The shock of my life was when I played in *Atys*, which Christie put on in 1987. I loved it so much and I thought this composer has to be served a little more.' He started with *Persée* (Astrée Naïve, 05/02); *Alceste*, out this month, is the seventh opera to be recorded. 'The special thing with Lully is that he created French opera: he was always questioning what he had done before, inventing new recipes, new scenes. Whenever I prepare a new Lully opera I admire his creativity and his genius; I don't think there is one weak piece.'

What about other composers? Rameau features heavily, of course, and his benchmark recording of *Pygmalion* on the Aparté label was Gramophone's Recording of the Month in the November issue. But that's not all: 'For some reason I'm not asked to conduct Bach, but there's Mozart, Monteverdi, Cavalli.' Next March he is conducting the Landi *Orfeo* in Amsterdam. 'I like doing unknown music, unknown composers, it's a little my *marque de fabrique*. For years my limit was the year 1800, but then we did the three *Tragédiennes* CDs with Véronique Gens (Virgin, 08/06, 10/09, 12/11) – arias from Lully to Saint-Saëns – and I discovered that music is music and there is no limit. Of course I am a harpsichord player and my taste makes me more affectionated to Baroque music.' (Rousset's fluent English can be charmingly idiosyncratic.) 'But I feel very happy with Verdi and Berlioz: I'd like to conduct *Les Troyens* one day. I refused *Pelléas* once, but I would probably accept it now.' Next June he is performing Gounod's *Faust* with Les Talens Lyriques: 'something new for the group and it will be the original version, with spoken dialogue'.

I went on to ask Rousset if he likes to conduct from the harpsichord. 'My group loves me to play with them, as a member, which is fine for madrigals or Pergolesi's *Stabat mater*. If it's a big work like an opera I love playing the recitatives: then, when I have to conduct, the other



Christophe Rousset conducts his Les Talens Lyriques from the harpsichord in a performance of Lully's *Amadis* at the Palace of Versailles in July 2013

harpsichordist takes my ideas and gives me exactly what I want. With Gluck the orchestra is playing all the time, and there's no harpsichord needed for Cherubini, so then I conduct throughout.' Does he play and conduct with other orchestras? 'Absolutely. I played the recits at Covent Garden and I had a wonderful experience. The sound produced by the orchestra is incredible, I had a precise idea of what I wanted and I got it. I think it creates a special relationship with the orchestra if you are a musician among them instead of just being the authority. And *Mitridate*, supposed to be a boring youth opera by Mozart, was actually very spicy and very hot and very fascinating for the audience. I conduct it quite a lot now, with original instruments or with a modern orchestra.' Although he never studied conducting, Rousset learned much from observing John Eliot Gardiner, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and, 'strangely enough', from conductors of contemporary music.

Mitridate was, of course, staged. I wondered if Rousset enjoyed concert performances of opera. 'The most important thing is the music,' he says. 'We are doing *Orphée et Eurydice* in Toulouse in February and I'm very happy to have a wonderful concert version rather than a mediocre staging. The composer makes the dramaturgy.' So how does he find working with stage directors? 'Every project is different. I've collaborated a lot with Pierre Audi in Amsterdam and we always have discussions beforehand. In other places, sometimes I arrive and discover things I haven't been told. But I think my job is actually to go in the direction of the stage director, because he is the creator; I'm just a performer, not creating anything, just giving life to the score as best I can. With Graham Vick at Covent Garden we went into every

kind of detail. With other revivals and an assistant director you just go the way it was before.'

I was interested in Rousset's views on the disparity between 'authentic' musical performance and 'modern' stage direction. Did he like traditional productions, or does he have a preference for radical ones? 'What's important is not the aesthetic but the spirit of the piece. So, for instance, when we did Cherubini's *Médée* in Brussels with Krzysztof Warlikowski it was very violent, very modern, the image was quite disturbing, but the spirit was there. And I've conducted Rameau with modern images, which worked very well for the same reason. I have nothing against

modernity and I admire directors who reflect their own time: it's interesting for today's audiences.' Rousset then recalled a production he saw of *Die Entführung* which had a Nazi setting. Osmin was an official stamping documents, everything was violent and disturbing, and it made the music sound weak. 'That's wrong. Even if the concept is interesting, that's wrong.'

A few hours after our chat, Rousset was to conduct *La morte d'Orfeo* with his young professionals (topped up with players from Les Talens Lyriques). He also gives harpsichord masterclasses. 'I'm happy to transmit my knowledge, and working with new talents is very stimulating.' In addition, he and his group work in schools, trying to 'sensibilise' (another nice Roussetism) the younger generation. Last season there was a project with *The Magic Flute*. 'It was a wonderful experience, young people aged 11 to 13 playing with my group. They don't reach a fantastic level, but' – said with a smile – 'they play and you can recognise the music.'

We created a community project in Paris and Dijon.





Outreach: Rousset passes on his knowledge by working with local schools

Some pupils were travelling away from home for the first time in their lives. They were so proud to be performing and the result was so touching.'

For a visit from Les Talens Lyriques, a school will prepare a project that might involve the teachers of language, history and geography as well as music. Schools were reluctant at first, but now they request visits. 'They understand that it creates harmony and a new spirit,' Rousset says, 'and the young people love it.' There is some support from the City of Paris and the Ministry of Education, but most comes from sponsors. Rousset and his colleagues have also developed apps on tablets so that pupils can understand how an orchestra works, how the various instruments play together. And they are hoping to make them available to everyone, free of charge.

'Alceste is both tragic and comic. There's a battle, a funeral and a comic scene – those moments are so intense and colourful'

Finally, it's back to Lully, the composer who delivered that *coup de foudre* with *Atys* back in 1987. Rousset recorded *Alceste* with Les Talens Lyriques after a concert performance at the Beaune Festival last July. 'It's from 1674, one of his earliest, and – unusually – it's both tragic and comic. It's full of effects, with a battle on stage, Hercules going down to Hell, Alceste's funeral and a comic scene for Charon. All those moments are incredibly intense and colourful. If you perform just what's written', he adds, 'it doesn't work. It's a bit like Monteverdi: you have to make it alive with a sense of theatre.'

Rousset admits that he is busy – something of an understatement – but relishes the adrenalin he gets from performing. As for the future, he has projects in Europe, and in North and South America, and he is teaching the younger generation. 'We have fantastic players,' he says. 'I just hope they will have an audience.'

Rousset's recording of Alceste on Aparté is reviewed next issue

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Tackling TIPPETT

As Martyn Brabbins launches his recorded symphony cycle, the new ENO Music Director talks to **Richard Bratby** about why now is the right time to reappraise this British composer

Orchestral musicians from English National Opera are streaming out the front door at Blackheath Halls just as it's getting dark. It has been a full day of rehearsals in this corner of suburban South East London, and we're a long way from the orchestra's West End home at the Coliseum. But the atmosphere feels lively. Players are lingering and chatting in the cafeteria, and Martyn Brabbins looks happy as he throws himself back into the only corner of his dressing room sofa that isn't covered in scores. He has just completed the first orchestral read-through of Nico Muhly's new opera *Marnie* – Brabbins's first production as Music Director of ENO – and he is delighted with his new band.

'They've been fantastic,' he says with enthusiasm.

'They just sight-read superbly. Nico's been here all day; he wouldn't miss it for the world. I've heard *Two Boys* [Muhly's previous opera, of 2011], and this is definitely a step on from that. The orchestral writing is incredibly refined and skilful. Being as close to it as we are, perhaps I'm not quite as objective as I should be. But it feels as though it's working, and it's got a good shape.' This is a clear-eyed assessment from a man who has just spent the day untangling a two-hour contemporary score in the presence of the composer. Clarity and unflappability are Brabbins's stock in trade; qualities that have helped make him one of today's foremost champions of rare, neglected and contemporary music.

Even the briefest dip into Brabbins's discography is enough to demonstrate this. He made his recording debut in 1994 with piano concertos by Henselt and Alkan (Hyperion, 8/94), and he has carried on as he started. There are no Beethoven or Mahler cycles amongst Brabbins's 140-plus recordings (though he'd handle both superbly – this is the man who conducted all nine Beethoven symphonies in one day at the 2003 Cheltenham Festival). It's a list that begins with Kalevi Aho and Simon Bainbridge, and runs on by way of Birtwistle, Bortkiewicz, Korngold and Cecil Coles to John Woolrich and Zemlinsky. If you're even slightly curious about non-standard repertoire from the last 150 years, chances are you'll own a good few of his recordings.

But we're here to talk about Sir Michael Tippett, whose complete symphonies Brabbins is recording for Hyperion with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (of which he was Associate Principal Conductor from 1994 to 2005). 'I knew Tippett, and we even worked together towards the end of his life,' he says. 'We did some projects with the Nash Ensemble, and although he didn't have many comments to make about the music, he said generous, warm things. I've always loved Tippett's music, but never had much chance to do it. I think it's vital that we perform and record these symphonies.'

'I've always loved Tippett's music, but never had the chance to do it. It's vital that we perform and record these symphonies'

Easy for Brabbins to say, of course. The first release (reviewed on page 42) comprises the official (we'll come back to that later) first two symphonies, dating from 1945 and 1958 respectively.

Tippett intended them as works in the tradition of Beethoven. 'But this is a real symphony!' exclaimed the conductor Walter Goehr, on receiving the score of the First, while the bracing cross-rhythms that open the Second were inspired by a chance hearing of a Vivaldi concerto by a sunlit Lake Lugano. The line back to those roots is clearly audible today, especially in performances as fresh and lucid as Brabbins's. Yet within living memory this music was viewed as problematic – even unplayable. The world premiere of the Second famously broke down on stage at the Royal Festival Hall. 'All my fault, ladies and gentlemen,' declared the conductor Adrian Boult, sportingly, and Brabbins has a certain amount of sympathy.

'There are lots of technical questions that you have to ask yourself with Tippett. Take the slow movement of the First Symphony, for instance. It's a sort of passacaglia in an incredibly slow tempo. It's eight beats to the bar, but most of the time there are triplets going against your beat. So it's getting that sense of flow, but obviously also being incredibly precise with pulse, otherwise it just starts to slip.' Put like that, the challenges sound formidable. 'The opening of the Second is very complicated. The way Tippett writes it' – Brabbins sings and beats the time – 'they're awkward intervals, difficult to play on the violin. It's very easy to slip up, and then things can go completely awry. Tippett wasn't a string player, so he doesn't necessarily write idiomatically.'



Brabbins is drawn to the 'luminous quality of the string sound that only Tippett knows how to generate' and believes the composer's music is more relevant than ever

'That is in no way a criticism,' Brabbins adds, without hesitation. And, as Tippett himself pointed out, there's very little in these works that you wouldn't find in Brahms. That, of course, includes the emotional content: the real (and indeed only) justification for performing or recording this music. 'The way he writes that extraordinary passacaglia in the First Symphony – what he does with each repetition, the way he overlaps the end of one and the beginning of the next – I mean, it's extraordinarily inventive. I find that movement incredibly moving. And listen to the scherzo, particularly the central trio section. There's this luminous quality to the string sound that only Tippett knows how to generate, the way that the sound breathes and glows in a way that other composers don't. It's something extraordinary.'

This new symphonic cycle comes on the tail of a series of recent Tippett revivals: the *Gramophone* Award-winning quartet cycle from the Heath Quartet (whose members can't have left school when Tippett died in 1998) and striking new productions of his operas *King Priam* and *The Ice Break*. I put it to Brabbins that two decades after Tippett's death, we might finally have got past his old image as the embarrassing uncle of British music.

'I think we have. The things that felt dated – the slang in *The Ice Break*, the fact that he wore stripy shirts – just don't matter anymore. People don't feel, "Oh, this is a bit embarrassing", or that the text is a bit silly. Maybe it is, in one way. With the Third Symphony, you read it through and you think, "Oh gosh, this is odd." But when it's married to the music, and you've heard it a few times, it makes absolute sense. I've conducted a lot of pieces with the BBC Scottish – they told me recently that we'd performed nearly 1000 different works together – but when we played the Third Symphony members of the orchestra came up to me afterwards and told me how moved they were. That says something.'

The next releases in the cycle should reaffirm the idea that this is Tippett for a new century. The rising Wagnerian soprano Rachel Nicholls will sing the sequence of blues that close the Third Symphony of 1972, Tippett's heartfelt, typically

quixotic attempt to renegotiate Beethoven's Ninth for the nuclear age. And Brabbins and his colleagues are working with electroacoustic music specialists Sound Intermedia to recreate the breathing effects that open and close the birth-to-death narrative of the Fourth (1977). The headline news, though, will be the premiere recording of the Symphony in B flat that the 29-year-old Tippett completed in 1934 but later withdrew because, Brabbins suspects, it 'sounded too much like Sibelius and Walton'.

Is it ethical, though, to record a work that Tippett disowned (in fact, he placed a ban on performances which has yet to elapse)? 'We thought very hard about that. The Tippett Foundation were in two minds, put it that way. It took them a good while to discuss it, and their decision wasn't unanimous. My argument is that the last generation of people who knew Tippett, including myself, and his publisher Sally Groves, and many others who loved him dearly, won't be around when the ban expires. So please can we hear it while there's still time? I'm sure Sir Michael, wherever he is, will forgive us. He was a generous-hearted man.'

You get the impression that this project has personal significance for Brabbins. Listening to him, one senses the same spirit of devotion, even obligation to the music and the wider musical community, that makes his recordings of even the quirkiest repertoire so warmly persuasive. Who else could have dived so deeply into the sonic universe of, say, the Derbyshire romantic Roger Sacheverell Coke (Hyperion, 11/17), music which – with the best will in the world – surely isn't going to enter the repertoire any time soon? Brabbins laughs. 'You say that, but just the other week I had a call from someone interested in performing Coke.' The conductor describes himself as a craftsman, and his meticulous approach to preparation and rehearsal makes him any programmer's first choice when confronted with a one-off like the 2011 BBC Proms performance of Havergal Brian's gargantuan *Gothic* Symphony, later released on Hyperion. ('We almost did it justice,' he reflects. 'I'd love to do it again – to be the only man in history to have conducted it twice!')



Power from the pit: Brabbins conducts Nico Muhly's *Marnie* in his new role as Music Director of English National Opera – he is 'utterly committed' to his new colleagues

Perhaps that enthusiasm stems from his schooldays, when Brabbins played the baritone in brass bands in Towcester, Northamptonshire. Without ever attending a specialist music college he went on to study with George Hurst ('a real genius, with a slightly awkward personality') and with Ilya Musin in what was then still Leningrad – an experience he has in common with Valery Gergiev, Rudolf Barshai, Semyon Bychkov and ENO's former Music Director Sian Edwards, and which led to invitations to conduct at La Scala and the Kirov. But you still suspect that, throughout his career, he's been motivated principally by a desire to do his best by his fellow musicians, and to give something back – whether that's through the annual conductors' course he founded on Orkney, his work with amateurs during his stint as Artistic Director of the Cheltenham Festival (2005-07), or in his mission to help the voices of forgotten composers to be heard.

And if that makes him sound like the dreaded 'safe pair of hands', just try a couple of Brabbins's recordings – the way he interweaves the epic and the intimate in Elgar's *Enigma Variations* (11/16), or his recent take on Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra (11/17), part of another ongoing cycle and described by Andrew Achenbach in these pages as 'a canvas of thrilling sweep, evocative power and vaulting ambition'.

True, as Brabbins himself admits: 'I'm in no way a precious maestro about this stuff. I think of myself not as a creator, but as a re-creator, as an artisan.' But he's unquestionably ambitious on behalf of the music. The idea to couple *A London Symphony* with Vaughan Williams's *Variations for Brass Band* was his own, as was the decision to have it performed by student musicians: a personal homage to his own early experiences as a teenage brass bandsman. 'I'm a visiting professor at the Royal College of Music, so when Simon Perry [of Hyperion] agreed that I could programme that piece, I went back to the College and said, "Look, could you provide a band?". And now it's only number two in the classical charts, I'll have you know!'

Further Vaughan Williams rarities are planned for later in the cycle, many newly orchestrated by Brabbins, who briefly aspired to be a composer. (His main creative outlet away from the

podium these days is needlework – he is currently working on a tapestry inspired by a trip to Japan with his wife Karen.)

Brabbins's is an attitude that augurs well for his directorial role at English National Opera, one that he never expected, but in which he has no difficulty in seeing himself as part of a company-wide team. That means discretion is the order of the day. He declines to be drawn on future plans beyond this season, though he admits to a consuming love of Wagner (he has already conducted *Die Walküre* at St Endellion and *Tristan* at Grange Park – 'Every time I do it, it somehow feels

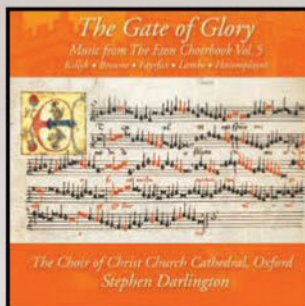
natural'). On the long-running question of ENO's commitment to opera sung in English? 'There's no way we would *never* sing in English. But that's just my view. I'm a conductor; every

day I'm thrown into the middle of a thousand musical and technical problems. So I'm not dogmatic about anything in my life. Apart from the fact that I've got one wife, and that I like real ale.'

And apart from the fact that – though he doesn't need to say it – he is utterly committed to his colleagues and the music they perform. 'The orchestra of ENO is amazingly flexible. They make a wonderful sound in the Coliseum, right from the word go. The chorus members really are acting singers – they function even better on stage than off. And they're my people. It's my chorus now, it's my orchestra, and I care passionately that they're able to function in the way they need to.'

Brabbins's recorded legacy proves that if you take care of the people, as much as the notes, great music-making will follow, and, as if to underline the point, he tells a story from his debut at La Scala: 'I was shown up to the orchestral rehearsal room and the manager just said, "This is Martyn Brabbins". And you know what happened? The whole orchestra stood up. I nearly fell over. But I got talking to the leader later on, and he explained, "Well, we stand up to show respect for the maestro. You've got one of two ways to go. You can keep that respect, or you can lose it." So I think respect in music-making is a hugely important part of what we do. I try and do a good job, and lead by example. Because if the conductor gets it right, generally speaking, so will the musicians.'

▶ Brabbins's recording of Tippett's Symphonies Nos 1 and 2 is reviewed on page 42



AV 2376

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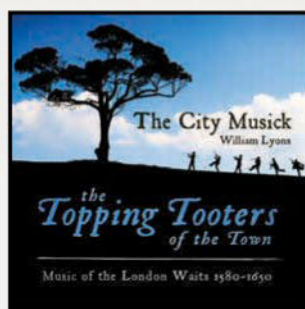


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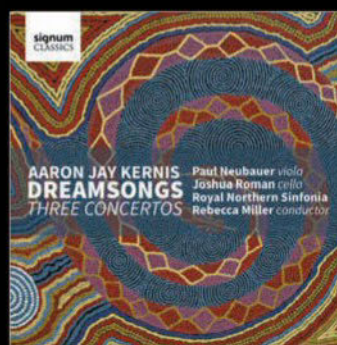
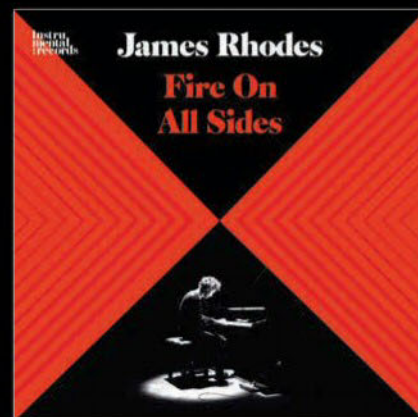


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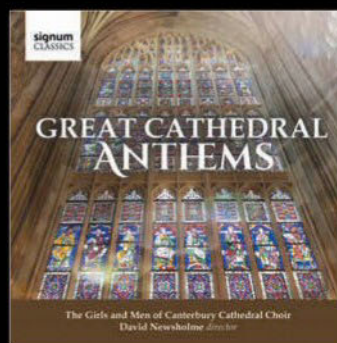
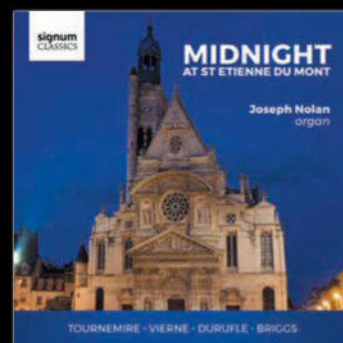
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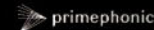
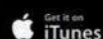
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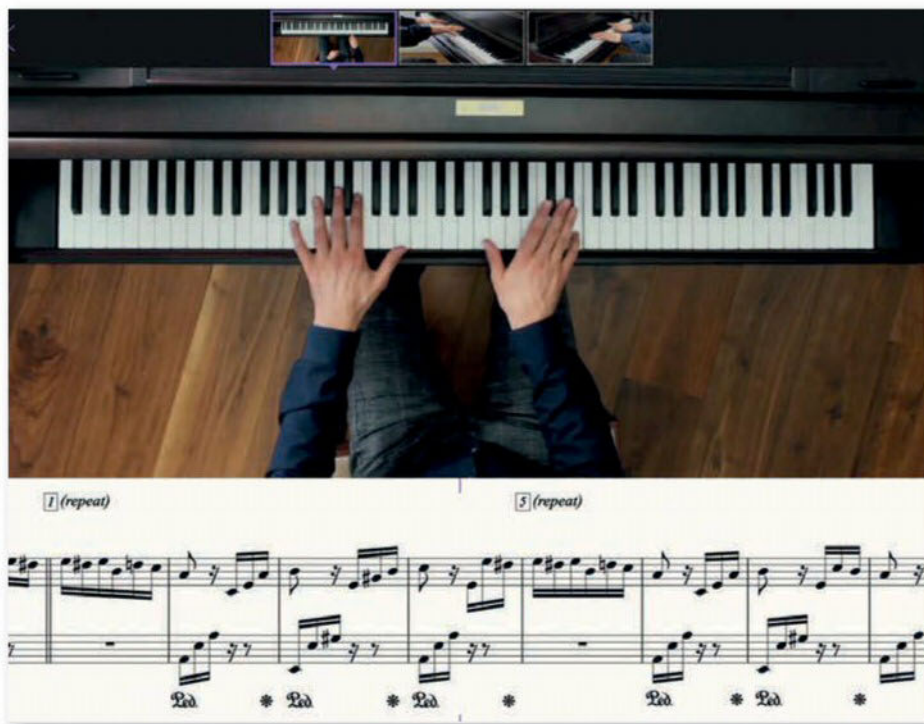
Directed by David Newsholme, the choir draw on the rich catalogue of British cathedral anthems from the 16th to the 20th century.

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MOBILE music-making

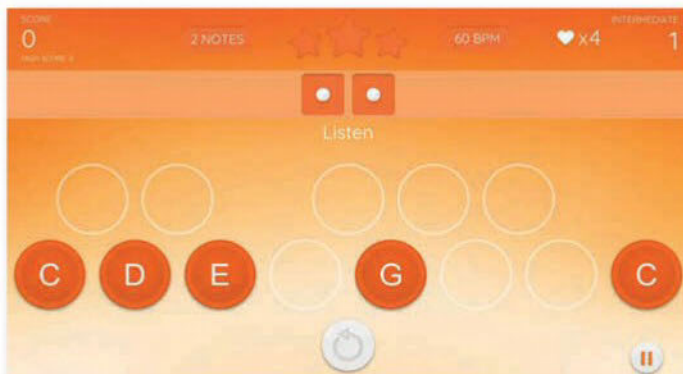
From score-reading to streaming, **Martin Cullingford** takes a look at some of the most engrossing musical apps

Five years ago, apps were being heralded as a potential future for cultural publishing. Some superb standalone offerings imaginatively exploited the potential of touchscreen tablets, and the best of those still hold their head up high half a decade on. Two superb examples came from Touchpress as then was (the company is now known as Amphio). Pianist Stephen Hough's exploration of the Liszt Sonata, complete with note patterns cascading down the page, multiple camera angles and in-depth commentary, was highly praised by us when launched. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was the subject of a collaboration with Deutsche Grammophon which placed four performances – Fricsay, Karajan, Bernstein and Gardiner – together for ease of instant comparison (and has seen an extraordinary 1.5m downloads!). We last surveyed the scene in 2014, but, despite this auspicious start, the app world has since moved in a slightly different direction. Rather than a vast new genre of boundary-pushing products, apps have tended to become access points to something else, be it scores or recordings – though we'll encounter a few impressive exceptions below. Cost is probably a factor – apps can be very expensive to produce – and so too I suspect has been device memory.

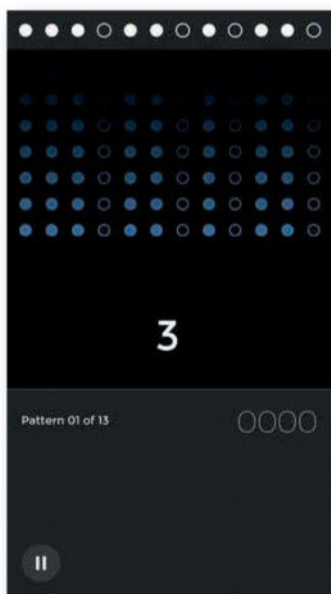
Let's start with those that are the 'way in' to streaming music, such as the mobile front ends to services, such as Idagio and Primephonic, or those covering all genres, including Qobuz, Spotify and Apple Music. We surveyed these services and their classical offerings in our November audio pages – you can check back there for details of the streaming services themselves – and generally the related apps offer a user-friendly mobile variant of the websites, with a few additional features and the possibility for offline listening. **Idagio's** app, for example, offers a mood wheel which puts one in mind of the wheel on the old-school iPod. A little swirl with the finger moves you through a plethora of moods from optimistic, joyful and radiant, on a troubling trajectory to nervous, angry, tragic, sad – but you then come full circle, and can be peaceful, relaxed and feeling festive once more. Aside from that, albums and playlists are presented clearly throughout. **Primephonic's** app is also clearly presented, with a spinning LP and icon-filled buttons. Those two are classical specific, but a vast amount of classical music can also be found at **Qobuz**, **Spotify** and **Apple Music**, and if you're not sure where to start – or just want to be guided through some well-thought-out listening – then all three feature playlists curated by *Gramophone*, including our weekly 'The Listening Room'. If you're already a streamer, you'll probably be familiar with one or more. There are also the apps that offer access to auditoriums throughout the world, such as Gothenberg's simple but stylish **GSOplay**, or the Berlin Philharmonic's **Digital Concert Hall**. After more music options? Type 'classical music' in to the app store and a whole host

of radio stations and listening collections appear.

There's another kind of 'access' app – and that's to scores. The King's Singers last month explained how the ease – both in use and travel – of digital scores has revolutionised the way they work. Three score apps allow you to follow where they tread. **Tido**, from the eminent publishing house Edition Peters is currently focused on music for piano (see main picture, above). Scores are reproduced with clarity on a calming paper-tint background, and a purple haze (rather than a line, thus recognizing flexibility in performance) moves according to what you're listening too – or, more importantly for performers, what you're playing. I'm not a pianist, but was impressed that when I picked up my guitar and muddled through a few pieces, it still did a very decent job of knowing where I was and turning the page on time. There are a variety of camera angles by which you can watch a piece being played (a straight-on keyboard camera, or two oblique angles), and a wealth of filmed guides set key works in historical context, talking players through issues from tempo to sounding the chords. Not everything gets the masterclass treatment – Albeniz's *España* earns an essay instead, but a well-illustrated one. There's a lot of music, enough in old-school



Meludia's music teaching method is both fun and educational



Challenge and develop your rhythmic skills with the Clapping Music App

quartets and voice. Here you pay per score via credits, but then own that music. The emphasis here feels much more on the playing, less on the learning and context. There's significant flexibility in way the score can be presented – from stave spacing, to fingering options, and the annotation function allows you to drag and drop symbols, write your own notes and share them. The Henle app comes from Amphio.

And, as we were preparing this issue, another score-reading app announced a tie-up with DG. **Tomplay**, like Tido above, accompanies its scores with music that you can hear and play along to (an instrumentalist can find a piano accompanist for a sonata, for example), many of the recordings now being taken from the Yellow Label's catalogue, including the likes of Argerich, Barenboim, Pires and Pollini. Annotation, tempo amendments and metronome markings are all available features. The score catalogue itself spans difficulty levels, from beginner to upper advanced, and also embraces other genres too.

Back to Amphio, and since our 2014 survey the app-maker has produced **The Juilliard String Quartet** app, which allows you to forensically explore the inner workings of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. A split-screen viewing option provides the opportunity to focus on each player, and even to enhance the volume of their individual part relative to the others. The musicians share out a commentary through the piece, which you can either read or listen to on top of the music, and there's a detailed analysis of the work. In 2015 Amphio also launched



Explore Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' in great depth with the Juilliard Quartet

its free **Clapping Music** app, an interactive app based on Steve Reich's work in which you aim to tap along to the shifting clapping patterns in the work. It's challenging, fun, and 200,000 downloads later I'm sure there are now an awful lot of people with much improved rhythmic skills!

A new education app comes from **Meludia**, which describes itself as a musical brain-teaser for beginners and professional musicians. While this is very serious in intent – the aim is nothing less than developing musical literacy – it's also fun. Meludia is the online incarnation of a music teaching method 30 years in the development, which involves immersion in exercises in identifying notes, intervals, rhythm, and changes in all of them. Who can benefit from the method? Well, anyone, it seems, from children upwards. It's also used in hospitals, social welfare situations, with senior citizens, prisoners – and few years back the Curtis Institute of Music gave every faculty member access to Meludia, while the baritone Thomas Hampson has even used it in masterclasses. The app – recently launched – only focuses on part of the method, melodic recognition. It starts right at the beginning with octave intervals, but by the time you reach the expert level, patterns are chosen from a much wider range of notes. The website itself goes much deeper, exploring rhythm and complex chords. High-profile advocates of the system include the violinist Nicola Benedetti and the tenor Joseph Calleja, while the countries of Estonia, Malta and – as of last month Canada – have even made it available to their entire populations for free. For the rest of us, subscription packages start at £4.99 per month.

Where do apps go from here? As mobile technology advances in such areas as augmented reality, so do the possibilities for enhancing our musical experiences. Amphio, meanwhile, is currently working with digital agency Isobar to produce an app using virtual reality to explore works including Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. But in the meantime, of course, there is also our very own *Gramophone* magazine app – almost a century of magazines available as digital issues. Christmas has just passed, but it's not too late to treat yourself ... **G**



Find music for your state of mind with Idagio's mood wheel

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Peter Quantrill listens to an overwhelming new account of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* from MusicAeterna and Teodor Currentzis, and relishes afresh the art of the studio recording



Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 6, 'Pathétique', Op 74

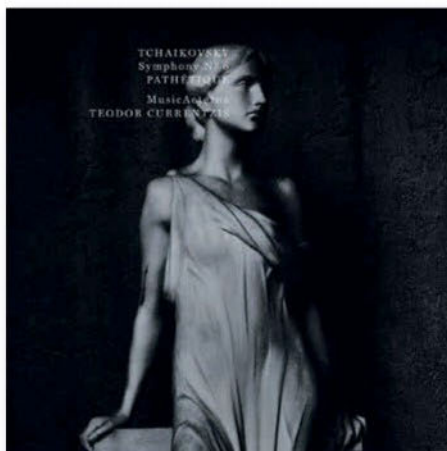
MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis

Sony Classical © 88985 40435-2 (46' • DDD)

You may be inclined to adjust your set from the very opening, and you should: the disc demands a high playback level when the neighbours are out; or, for a sleepless night, on decent headphones.

Currentzis and the engineering team (who should properly be credited here: producer Damien Quintard, assisted by Arnaud Merckling and Afanasy Chupin) have crafted the kind of studio-made experience that went out of fashion two decades ago and more. There are very many things here that it would be impossible to achieve in concert, though I'd like to see MusicAeterna try. Take that opening again, the first page in a chronicle of a death foretold if ever there was one. The bassoon solo is phrased neither in three linked but expressively impotent segments, nor as the unending melody of which Karajan was often falsely, sometimes justly charged. Rather, it swells and recedes in continual motion with acute sensitivity both to the composer's minutely detailed markings, and in response to the more glacially shifting string harmonies (a long way) beneath.

Then silence: not the silence of drawing breath or anticipation but black; not a dead black like the sound engineer's jargon for the end of an LP side but black as Vantablack, fathomless. This is a symphony of silences; Currentzis has calibrated them with the unsparing precision of a Pinter or a Haneke. From him you



'Violas tear into their lines like jackals dining at carrion, miked to a point where you can hear the rosin-clouds fly'



Tchaikovsky composed the *Pathétique* in 1893, the year of his death

might expect the striking of attitude and individualistic exploitation of technology that produced an uneven trilogy of Mozart/da Ponte operas and does not so much skirt as abandon itself to a crater of molten solipsism. Perhaps, in the *Pathétique*, Currentzis has met his match.

What is new, and delightful, is the shaping of the second theme as a question and answer, played as if *en pointe*: a happy inspiration which brings necessary if short-lived relief and which comes to have significant ramifications for the scale of the movement's climax. When the long-withheld *Allegro vivo* finally arrives it does so with primeval savagery, as a precursor to the 'Augurs of spring' from Stravinsky's *Rite* of 20 turbulent years later (a rehearsal aperçu of Bernstein's, I discovered after observing it in Currentzis). Violas tear into their line like jackals dining at carrion, miked to a point where you can hear the rosin-clouds fly, and there is a calculated claustrophobia to this passage that no live concert-hall ambience could emulate. Hysteria, however, is kept in abeyance by the conductor's ear: the symphony's harmonic skeleton gleams with a wan and often unnerving clarity. Having at the movement's cataclysm engineered an ecstasy of grieving to rival for sustained pathos even Bernstein's long goodbye in New York, Currentzis displays the refinement of sensibility to bestow a numbed and steadily paced dignity upon the coda.

The inner movements operate at a lower voltage, more sober and Classically contained than



Mature beyond his years: Teodor Currentzis and his hand-picked orchestra bring a controlled ferocity to Tchaikovsky

you might expect, played in fulfilment of a notably Brahmsian function rather than as interludes vividly contrasted in their own right. Lovely work from the cellos brings no shortage of charm and grace to a properly symphonic waltz. In the accumulating counterpoint of the march is a *Pathétique* as precursor to Mahler's Ninth, and the voicing is sundered into discrete forces of contention across the entire sound stage in the manner of 1970s recordings by Karajan or even a Melodiya special: the attendant thrill and prospect of entropy are near at hand, as they are in Ives's marching bands or indeed the first-act climax of *Don Giovanni*.

The finale opens with an exhalation from Currentzis, translated by the strings into a memorial of overlapping sighs and then punctuated by what sounds like the bass drum from the march. At this point the Berlin studio acoustic expands to cavernous dimensions to contain and

then bury the symphony's last rites. There is more playing on the lip of the volcano from *col legno* strings and snarling, muted horns, more outstanding bassoon solos coloured on a palette from muddy brown to that black again.

It's early days, but only the most exalted of comparisons suggest themselves: to Bernstein (DG, 5/87), Cantelli (EMI, 6/53), Karajan (take your pick) or Mravinsky (DG, considered afresh in November 2015): all hewn out of different performing traditions while sculpted in relief from them, though none save Mravinsky executed to the present, uncanny degree of controlled ferocity. There is a closer, more pertinent relation with Mikhail Pletnev's first essay (Virgin Classics, 1/92): a hand-picked band, moulded in the image of a young, mercurial musician mature beyond his years, working hand in glove with a studio team prepared to do things differently. I remember the

storm unleashed by that recording 25 years ago. Will this also upset some applegarts? It is an unsettling experience. **Peter Quantrill**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Edward Seckerson welcomes an album of Richard Rodney Bennett:

'Bennett counted Symphony No 3 his favourite piece and on the strength of this, my first encounter, I can see why' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 35**



Harriet Smith is in good hands for indulging her love of Grieg:

'Bavouzet bewitches in the concerto's slow movement, in the clarity of his lines and also in the sense of ebb and flow' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**

Adams

City noir^a. The Gospel According to the Other Mary^b. Harmonielehre^c. Lollapalooza^d. Scheherazade.2^e. Short Ride in a Fast Machine^d. The Wound-Dresser^e
^bKelley O'Connor *mez* ^bTamara Mumford *contr*
^bDaniel Bubeck, ^bBrian Cummings, ^bNathan Medley *countertens* ^bPeter Hoare *ten* ^eGeorg Nigl *bar* ^eLeila Josefowicz *vn* ^aTimothy McAllister *alto sax* ^bBerlin Radio Chorus; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / ^{ce}John Adams, ^aGustavo Dudamel, ^dAlan Gilbert, ^eKirill Petrenko, ^bSir Simon Rattle
 Berliner Philharmoniker (F) (S) (4) + (2) (S)
 BPHR170141 (4h 58' + 6h 36' • DDD • T)
 Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, 2016-17
 Concert video Blu-ray discs include interviews and documentary 'Short Rides with John Adams'



Like its politics, the buffeting turbulence of

culture in the United States today is difficult to describe to anyone who hasn't experienced it first-hand. The unruly chorus of contending and contentious voices is of course a given. But of the musicians I know, the one who comes closest to mirroring the often baffling complexities and contradictions of the contemporary American condition is John Adams. Moreover, he's been doing it for decades with a kind of determined, fearless joy.

Adams, a born-and-bred New Englander who early on put down deep roots in California, turned 70 last year. During 2016-17 he was named the Berlin Philharmonic's composer-in-residence and this handsomely packaged release represents the fruits of that collaboration. The Philharmonic with various soloists present stunning performances of seven pieces composed by Adams between 1985 and 2015, under five distinguished conductors including the composer. All were recorded live at the Berlin Philharmonie and may be viewed as well as heard on two sumptuously produced Blu-ray discs.

In the classic 1966 essay 'Against Interpretation', the late Susan Sontag defended appreciation of what she called the art object's 'sensuous surface'. It is precisely the multifaceted, gem-like surfaces of the mighty *Harmonielehre* that make it the most recorded of Adams's large-scale orchestral works. It may also be the earliest work to cement his place among the great orchestrators, that select company dating back to Berlioz, Liszt, Strauss and Mahler. But beyond its magisterial exploration of orchestral space, density, depth and timbre, *Harmonielehre* is a visionary work of tremendous emotional range and power. The Berliners acquit themselves magnificently in a virtuoso performance under Adams's baton, who here records the piece for the first time. Purity of sound, rhythmic precision and attention to detail make this a recording quite unlike any other to date. If there's no experience quite like hearing *Harmonielehre* live in a hall, this is certainly a very close second, due in no small measure to the brilliant sound engineering.

Adams also conducts the most recent work in the set, *Scheherazade.2*, with the incomparable Leila Josefowicz, for whom it was composed, as violin soloist. Subtitled a 'dramatic symphony', à la Berlioz, this contemporary reimagining of the storyteller of the *Arabian Nights* as an empowered, strong, 21st-century woman in conflict with a cruelly oppressive and doctrinaire male establishment, for all its sensual allure, is gripping. Throughout the symphony's four movements Josefowicz, Adams and the Berliners achieve an almost symbiotic singularity of will. Alan Gilbert takes the podium for two smaller-scale works, *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* and *Lollapalooza*, both of which burst with energy and colour.

Like the contemporary films *Chinatown* and *LA Confidential*, Adams's *City noir* is a contemporary evocation of a specific Hollywood ethos from the late 1940s and early '50s, typified by *Double Indemnity*, *The Big Sleep*, *Laura* and the novels of Philip

Marlowe and Raymond Chandler. Appropriately, it's conducted here by Gustavo Dudamel, who led the 2009 premiere at Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Hall. *City noir*, perhaps more than any other Adams piece, qualifies as a veritable concerto for orchestra. In addition to the alto saxophone solo, played here brilliantly by Timothy McAllister, who also played the premiere, solo parts for trumpet, trombone, horn, viola and double bass are superlatively realised in this performance. The orchestra as a whole negotiates the score's highly complex jazz idiom with aplomb, capturing its sultry atmosphere with naturalness and ease.

If the set has one element which is perhaps not up to the high standards of the rest, it is the setting of Whitman's *The Wound-Dresser*. Kirill Petrenko conducts this painfully restrained elegy with taste and discretion. Georg Nigl, on the other hand, despite the richness of his velvet baritone, somehow doesn't quite plumb the depths of Whitman's text. And perhaps no non-native English speaker could. Sanford Sylvan, for whom *The Wound-Dresser* was written and who has recorded it twice, has raised the expressive bar dizzyingly high.

By far the largest piece in the set is the Passion oratorio *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*. All the soloists who sang the premiere in Los Angeles under Dudamel in 2012 and recorded it the next year recreate their characterisations here, the sole exception being the role of Lazarus, originally sung by Russell Thomas but here portrayed compellingly by the British tenor Peter Hoare. Maintaining tension and momentum during this two and a half-hour musical journey is a challenge. Simon Rattle steers a course that is at once devout and deeply serious, without ever becoming ponderous. Living with *The Gospel* for half a decade has deepened the soloists' comfort with the score. So, though perhaps not qualitatively superior to the original recording, this performance exhibits greater cohesion and clarity. The luxuriously lifelike sound the engineers



Old skills married to new inspiration: the first disc of Philippe Jordan's Beethoven cycle with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra augurs well

have so artfully captured here, and indeed throughout the entire set, gives Berlin the edge. This is a treat not to be missed.

Patrick Rucker

► See review of the documentary 'Short Rides with John Adams' on page 113

Baker

Piano Concerto, 'From Noon to Starry Night'^a.

Aus Schwanengesang^b

^aMarc-André Hamelin *pf* Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra / ^bJuanjo Mena, ^aGilbert Varga

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559804 (50' • DDD)

Recorded live at Hilbert Circle Theatre,

Indianapolis, ^bOctober 9 & 10, 2009;

^aJanuary 7 & 8, 2011



Here are two substantial works by the Bloomington-based composer

Claude Baker (b1948), whose Piano Concerto (2010), written to celebrate the centenary of Indiana University, is also a tribute to Walt Whitman. Titles from the latter's poems preface each movement, though only the first, 'Drum Taps', and the cadenza-like fourth, 'Dalliance', eschew allusions to other composers. The second,

'Silent Sun', quotes from Ives's *Concord* Sonata while the third, 'Lilacs', takes in both Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder* and Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*; the finale, 'Ecstatic Ghost', draws on Messiaen and Ives inter alios in an aura of mystical rapprochement. Less certain is the integration between these and Baker's own music, akin to Ruggles in its often dissonant yet never atonal harmony, such that a personal identity never quite materialises.

This is less an issue in *Aus Schwanengesang*, which takes the Heine settings from Schubert's posthumous cycle then rearranges their order according to the poet's 'Die Heimkehr'. These are not orchestrations but paraphrases of the original songs – moving from the tense expectation of 'Das Fischermädchen', via the ominous rapture and fraught emotion of the composite 'Am Meer' and 'Die Stadt', climaxing with the horror of 'Der Doppelgänger' which carries over into the yearning of 'Ihr Bild', before ending in the fatalism of 'Der Atlas'. Effective as a concept, its falling between transcription and re-composition again places Baker's voice at the periphery.

Performances could hardly be bettered. Marc-André Hamelin conjures scintillating

pianism, while Gilbert Varga and Juanjo Mena secure committed orchestral playing. Another work might have brought Baker's idiom into greater focus: there was certainly room on this disc.

Richard Whitehouse

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 1, Op 21; No 3, 'Eroica', Op 55

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan

Solo Musica Wiener Symphoniker (F) WS013

(72' • DDD)

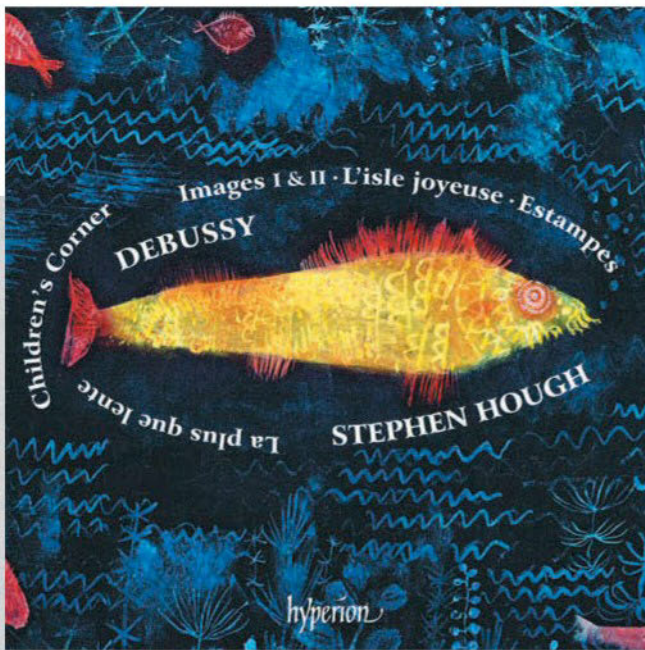
Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna, February 25 & 26, 2017



Though the Vienna Philharmonic has recorded many Beethoven cycles,

the city's distinguished second orchestra, the Vienna Symphony, has found less favour with record companies. Some fine individual Beethoven recordings were made in the early days of LP under the direction of Klemperer and Horenstein but Karajan, the orchestra's de facto principal conductor at the time, was contracted elsewhere, and his successor, Wolfgang Sawallisch, also recorded no Beethoven with the Vienna

hyperion



Any new release from Stephen Hough is a keenly awaited event, and this recital of some of Debussy's best-loved works for solo piano sets the bar high in this, the centenary of the composer's death.

CDA68139
Available Friday 29 December 2017

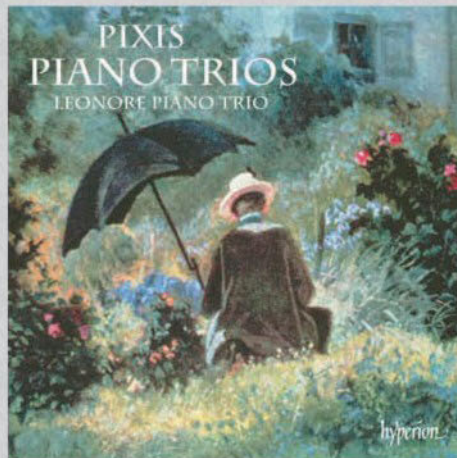
Claude Debussy: Piano Music
STEPHEN HOUGH piano

Three early Romantic piano trios which cannot fail to charm in such persuasive performances as these.

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**Johann Peter Pixis:
Piano Trios**

LEONORE PIANO TRIO



More rare Renaissance treasures conjured by Stephen Rice and The Brabant Ensemble.

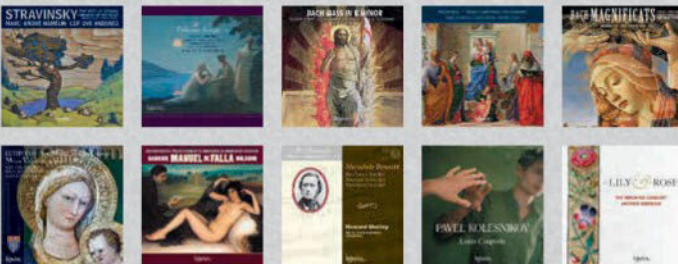
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**Jacob Obrecht:
Missa Gregorum & motets**
THE BRABANT ENSEMBLE
STEPHEN RICE conductor



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Bach: Mass in B minor Trinity College Choir Cambridge, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Stephen Layton
Bennett: Piano Concertos Nos 1-3 Howard Shelley (piano), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Howard Shelley
Falla: Fantasia baetica & other piano music Garrick Ohlsson (piano)



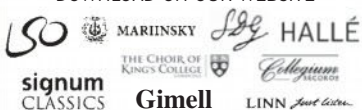
The first instalment in a complete cycle of some of the most important symphonies written in the last century.

CDA68203
Available Friday 29 December 2017

**Sir Michael Tippett:
Symphonies Nos 1 & 2**
BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MARTYN BRABBINS conductor



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Symphony. Now, in the age of the in-house label, amends can be made. And handsomely so, if the first release in this new project with the orchestra's current principal conductor Philippe Jordan is anything to go by.

A little over a year has passed since a filmed cycle directed by Jordan was released on DVD (Arthaus Musik, 12/16). That was an essentially local phenomenon, the musicians of the Paris Opéra, of which Jordan is music director, being taken from their usual comfort zone to touch base with a French Beethoven tradition that goes back to the 1830s. By contrast, this new Vienna cycle is clearly the one with which 43-year-old Jordan intends to make his case.

In the notes to both sets, Jordan pays lip service to the preoccupations of our age: slimmed-down orchestras, fast metronomes, controlled vibrato, pointed articulation. In reality, such criteria date back, not to the 1970s, but to the Beethoven-conducting of Toscanini and Erich Kleiber in the 1920s. And it is to that larger, less doctrinaire tradition than Jordan himself clearly belongs.

You hear this in the first movement of the *Eroica*, which is tauter here than in Paris, less given to mannerism. The pace is a touch brisker than that we remember from recordings by Toscanini, Szell, Karajan, Bruno Walter and others (mm=54 as opposed to mm=52). Yet nowhere does it begin to approach Beethoven's mm=60 (added retrospectively in 1817) which has been so fetishised of late, resulting in performances that are too quick for the music to be heard.

Jordan has dubbed the *Eroica* the first great 'finale' symphony; and so it is if, like him, you know where the great staging posts are movement by movement. The finale is certainly brilliantly done, even though, as in Paris, the first and second violins appear not to be antiphonally divided. Once again, the Funeral March is superbly presented: forward-moving in the French manner, with keenly felt climaxes.

These Vienna performances are generally a touch swifter than their Paris counterparts, with the first movement of the First Symphony notably brisker and more purposeful, a necessary amendment. At first I thought the finale a touch too quick but the performance is never gabbled or out of kilter, merely vivid. The serenading slow movement again goes with an enlivening swing, for all that it is a touch light on the *cantabile* which Beethoven also prescribes.

The recordings, which the sleeve claims are live, were made in Vienna's Musikverein. They provide a cleaner,

drier, more up-front sound than that on Rattle's problematically live 2001 Vienna Philharmonic set (EMI, 4/03). The discreet halo of reverberation recalls the sound DG's engineers drew from Berlin's Jesus-Christus-Kirche for the celebrated 1961-62 Karajan cycle.

In sum, here are old skills married to new inspiration. At this late hour in the history of Beethoven on record, it would be unreasonable to ask for more.

Richard Osborne

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

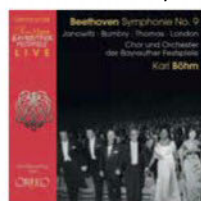
Gundula Janowitz *sop* Grace Bumbry *mez*

Jess Thomas *ten* George London *bass* Bayreuth

Festival Chorus and Orchestra / Karl Böhm

Orfeo mono (F) C935 171B (71' • DDD)

Recorded live, July 23, 1963



None of the six occasions on which the Ninth has been given at Bayreuth

have lacked cultural or political significance. Seven, if you count Wagner's own performance of his chosen *Bühnenweihfestinsfonie* down the hill at the Margrave's opera house on the afternoon of May 22, 1872, having laid the new theatre's foundation stone. The year 1962 had marked an attempt by his grandsons Wieland and Wolfgang to reboot the slippery ideals of 'New Bayreuth' ('Here art is our only goal') which had been proclaimed both on posters at the theatre's reopening in 1951 and in sound by Furtwängler's act of reconsecration, after the depredations of jazz and Puccini visited upon the place by wartime American soldiers.

The 69-year-old Karl Böhm made a belated festival debut that year with Wieland's new staging of *Tristan*. His springy, unsentimental Mozart (in, say, the EMI *Così* from 1955) had been key to the hire but a fertile imagination would be required to hear it at work in the slightly tentative violin entry (shades of Furtwängler!) and then monolithically established pulse of the opening movement. The booklet implies that Böhm used Wagner's orchestral retouchings especially for the occasion but in fact only in the last of his six extant performances of the symphony on record (a spacious swansong from Vienna in 1980 – 11/81) did the conductor abandon them.

The most salient Wagnerian element of this Ninth may rather be found in the finale's cello recitatives, taken almost as

much in tempo as Böhm's powerful Dresden recording from 1944, irresistibly bringing to mind in this context Sachs pondering the folly of the world as the curtain rises on the last act of *Die Meistersinger*. Otherwise, in the firm momentum, sleek moulding and Classically wind-heavy balancing of the inner movements may be detected the ghostly hand of Richard Strauss upon his friend's shoulder. In the second theme of the *Adagio* there is playing of great and joyful communion, between winds and strings, between Böhm and his men.

A plywood baffle, visible in the booklet photos, was specially constructed to project the sound of the chorus from the stage of the Festspielhaus; it appears to have worked no better than one expects of such devices. While a distinct improvement on previous exhumations which have done the rounds, Orfeo's excellent new transfer from a Bavarian radio source only serves to clarify how much Janowitz dominated her colleagues on this occasion, though they were all more seasoned Bayreuth performers. More as a historical than a musical document, the release is significant, but who will fill in the most intriguing pieces of the jigsaw history of the Ninth at Bayreuth, and bring back to us the accounts of Strauss (1933) and Hindemith (1952)?

Peter Quantrill

Richard Rodney Bennett

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'

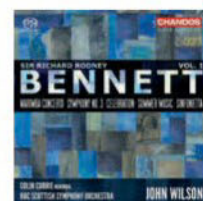
Celebration. Concerto for Marimba and Chamber Orchestra^a. Symphony No 3.

Summer Music. Sinfonietta

^aColin Currie *marimba*

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / John Wilson

Chandos (F) CHSA5202 (62' • DDD/DSD)



Richard Rodney Bennett wore his prodigious talent lightly – but he dispensed it generously. From hardcore Darmstadt beginnings to friendlier tonalities; from movies and TV to his passion for the American Songbook, where his pianistic gifts shone so inventively. Was there anything he couldn't say musically? No need to answer that – but rather to rejoice in the fact that his friend and champion John Wilson is honouring him in this new series for Chandos.

First up, Bennett arrives disguised as William Walton in a celebratory 'fanfare' for orchestra – *Celebration* (1991) – whose wiry string figures and angular syncopations raise the question: is this

a tribute or an impersonation? Either way, it is very knowing and virtuosic, and does exactly what it says in the title.

The Concerto for marimba and chamber orchestra (1987-88) is an excellent example of Bennett exploring the possibilities of a particular instrumental 'palette' and finding music which will best express its character. Dreamy and sensuous. It's as if the marimba – in Colin Currie's expert hands – has insinuated its way into someone else's 'trip'. It assumes a super-discreet, obbligato-like role outside of the cadenzas and the only concerto-like confrontation occurs in the second movement, where it displays an uncharacteristic defiance.

Summer Music for flute and small orchestra is Fauré-esque and began as a piece (with piano) for budding flautists. Its simplicity (as in purity) is its charm but more than that it's the kind of confection that Bennett could spin effortlessly. His *Sinfonietta* for orchestra (1984) also hides its craft behind its spontaneity but in its integrated slow movement – *Lento e dolce* – delivers a melody of very particular Bennett inflection and sensibility. Just gorgeous. *Far From the Madding Crowd* (as in Bennett's unforgettable score for the 1967 movie) is suddenly 'in the air' once more.

But you will want this disc for Symphony No 3 (1987) – a work of quiet evolution and tiny revelations. Bennett counted the symphony his favourite piece and on the strength of this, my first encounter, I can see why. The fact that it came easily to him is reflected in its free-flowing development, the way in which the fine-spun melodic idea that opens it is, if you like, a theme in the making, an evolving idea in search of shape and form. It finds it at the climax of the first movement, where the rhapsodising suddenly ceases and a sense of fulfilment is momentarily achieved.

The limpidity of the scoring is masterly – not least in the central *Allegretto* – but it is the oboe solo opening a magic casement on to the slow movement where the symphony begins to reveal its depth with increasing emotional intensity. That favourite composerly device, variation (and I'm now thinking also of Leonard Bernstein), eventually brings about one final 'transformation' of the main subject. Then a riposte from solo cello which, disproportionate to its brevity, moved me greatly – and one final consonance, a unison as simple as it is inevitable as it is revelatory. John Wilson and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra do the piece proud. I anticipate the next instalment eagerly. **Edward Seckerson**

Brahms

Symphony No 2, Op 73. Academic Festival Overture, Op 80. Tragic Overture, Op 81
Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen /
Paavo Järvi
RCA Red Seal © 88985 45946-2 (67' • DDD)



Orchestrally speaking, these are performances of refinement and style; rarely have

I heard the *poco sostenuto* end to the Second Symphony's third-movement Intermezzo so beguilingly phrased and timed. Yet, beautifully articulated as they are, these are performances that rarely travel far beyond the notes.

With the two overtures, Järvi's lack of experience as a theatre conductor may be a factor. Brahms's students are surely more richly drawn, and deserve to be better characterised, than they are in this spick and span account of the *Academic Festival Overture*. And that's the easier of the two; for as Sir Adrian Boult once remarked, the *Tragic Overture*, though not difficult to play, is unusually difficult to 'bring off'.

I think here of the central development, where Brahms halves the tempo and conjures a mood reminiscent of those lines in Robert Frost's 'Birches' about the times when he is 'weary of considerations' and 'life is too much like a pathless wood'. Not that everyone sees meaning here. No less a Brahmsian than Karl Geiringer thought the entire overture 'colourless'. If you share such misgivings, Järvi's performance might be for you.

No one has claimed that the Second Symphony lacks colour. Here the inner movements are beautifully done but in the finale one is aware (not for the first time) of a worrying lack of weight in the string sound and the sound palettes they can draw on. How, for example, does one create the grey, before-dawn chill of the *più tranquillo* which prefaces the finale's recapitulation if the entire movement has been so sparingly painted, more an essay in grisaille than a painting in oils? And this has knock-on effects. How can the all-important trombones bring to the symphony's jubilant end the weighty tones the great Brahms orchestras in Vienna, Berlin and Leipzig are licensed to unleash?

The opening movement poses other questions. Is this Eden and, if so, what are we to make of Brahms's evident sense of troubles within? In Järvi's case, not a lot. His is an essentially lyrical view of the music, one that's reinforced by his decision to double the length of the mainly lyric

exposition by taking the first-movement repeat. By the time we reach the great horn threnody near the movement's end, it's not entirely clear why it's there, such has been the downplaying of the movement's stormier developments. **Richard Osborne**

Debussy • Rachmaninov • Stravinsky

Debussy Printemps Rachmaninov Spring, Op 20^a Stravinsky The Rite of Spring
Rodion Pogassov bar Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra /
Vasily Petrenko
Onyx © ONYX4182 (67' • DDD)



Three very different musical responses to spring make up this enterprising

programme from Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Given Petrenko's Russian background, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* is an obvious candidate, and he conducts a suitably vigorous performance. Stravinsky and Rachmaninov might not seem the most natural bedfellows but the cantata *Spring*, composed in 1902, was the latter's first major choral work and is all too rarely recorded. Debussy's *Printemps* adds a dash of French froth to this dark Russian fare.

As anyone who has heard their recent Tchaikovsky cycle will know, the RLPO are in cracking shape under Petrenko's baton, with playing that is both vibrant and urgent. This pays huge dividends in a pulsating *Rite*. In 2015 Teodor Currentzis set, for me, a new standard for *Rite* recordings with a wild, cataclysmic account on Sony. Petrenko's isn't quite as ferocious – despite a thumping good bass drum thrillingly caught by the Onyx engineers – but he delivers a fierce, taut reading. Petrenko sets a flowing tempo for the 'Mystic Circles of the Young Girls' and sets up a pounding 'Glorification of the Chosen One' in a thoroughly satisfying reading.

Rachmaninov's cantata *Vesna* ('Spring') was composed as a vehicle for Fyodor Chaliapin. The soloist sings the role of a peasant, preparing to kill his faithless wife during the bitter winter only for the arrival of spring to bring about a change of heart. Baritone Rodion Pogassov is a solid soloist, albeit without Sergei Leiferkus's sardonic, biting way with the text on Charles Dutoit's Philadelphia recording for Decca. And that text? You'll have to go online to find it. You'd have thought it

would be possible to squeeze it into the six-page booklet, but no.

Dutoit also featured as my comparative listening for Debussy's *Printemps*, this time with his French-Canadian Montreal SO. There is plenty of tenderness in the opening section, if not enjoying the same gossamer acoustic enjoyed in Montreal, while the Liverpoolians swagger down the boulevards with almost as much panache in the finale. This is a most enjoyable, entertaining disc. **Mark Pullinger**

Debussy – selected comparison:

Montreal SO, Dutoit (8/95^B) (DECC) 460 217-2DF2 or 475 3132DC4

Rachmaninov – selected comparison:

Leiferkus, Philadelphia Orch, Dutoit (8/94^B) (ELOQ) ELQ476 7702

Stravinsky – selected comparison:

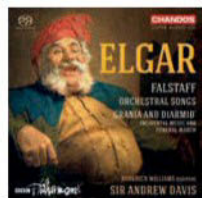
MusicAeterna, Currentzis (11/15) (SONY) 88875 06141-2

Elgar

Falstaff, Op 68. *Three Songs*, Op 59^a. *Two Songs*, Op 60^a. *Grania and Diarmid*, Op 42 – *Incidental Music*; *Funeral March*. *The Wind at Dawn*^a. *The Pipes of Pan*^a. *Pleading*, Op 48^a. *The King's Way*^a. *Kindly do not SMOKE (Smoking Cantata)*^a

^a**Roderick Williams** *bar*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis
Chandos ㉿ CHSA5188 (74' • DDD/DSD • T)



This is Andrew Davis's third recording of Elgar's *Falstaff*. It is, not to

beat about the bush, a superbly perceptive traversal, evincing a strength of purpose, emotional candour and meticulous attention to detail that give it the edge over its notable predecessors featuring the New Philharmonia (Lyrita, 9/75) and BBC SO (Warner Apex, 8/05). Right from the outset there's an irresistibly idiomatic swagger, acuity and temperament that put me in mind of both the composer's own

miraculous 1931 account and the classic 1964 Barbirolli, Shakespeare's fat knight effortlessly springing to life before our very eyes in all his complexity and, at the last, frailty (the wistful closing pages are enormously touching here).

Insights abound, among them the humorous depiction of Falstaff dozing off prior to the first dream interlude (memorable contributions from bassoon and tuba); the thrilling bite of *marcato* lower strings as Sir John and his motley band of recruits are 'soundly peppered' on the battlefield (track 6, at 1'45" and again at 2'02"); those truly *con fuoco* violins and violas from two after fig 109 (track 9, 0'17"); and the glowering pomp and spectacle of King Henry V's coronation, where the *Grandioso* reprise of Hal's theme at fig 127 (track 10, 2'26") hits home in properly devastating fashion. No doubt about it: as *Falstaffs* go, this impressively engineered newcomer demands to be heard.

Elsewhere, the baritone Roderick Williams is at his eloquent best in an attractive selection of orchestral songs, the standout items being 'Twilight' from the Op 59 set (an utterly spellbinding setting from 1909 of a poem by Gilbert Parker), the passionate Op 60 diptych from 1910 (to words by a certain Pietro d'Alba, Elgar's own pseudonym), and the softly elegiac 'Pleading' (a 1908 setting of Arthur Salmon's poem). We also get one of the composer's japes in the shape of the enjoyably bonkers *Smoking Cantata* (1919), a 40-second setting of a request to house guests from his good friend Edgar Speyer ('Kindly, kindly, kindly do not SMOKE in the hall or staircase!'). In addition, we're treated to a sublimely atmospheric rendering of the two purely orchestral excerpts from the 1901 incidental music for *Grania and Diarmid*. All told, a terrific anthology, and absolutely not to be missed. **Andrew Achenbach**

Grieg

Piano Concerto, Op 16^a.

Peer Gynt – Incidental Music, Op 23^b

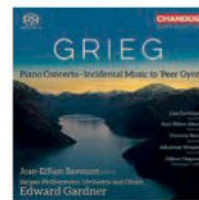
^b**Lise Davidzen**, ^b**Ann-Helen Moen**, ^b**Victoria Nava**

sops ^b**Johannes Weisser** *bar* ^b**Håkon Høgemø**

Hardanger fiddle ^a**Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** *pf*

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner

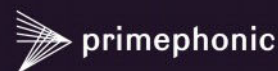
Chandos ㉿ CHSA5190 (83' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



What could be more authentic than the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra performing

Grieg – a composer with whom they had a close relationship (he was even briefly their artistic director)? This is their first exploration of the composer with their current chief conductor Edward Gardner and though it's an unusual coupling, it makes sense to bring together Grieg's most popular works.

The use of a Hardanger fiddle is a neat touch (something that Neeme Järvi does use, while son Paavo Järvi does not). The instrument connects Grieg to his folk roots and it's superbly played on this new set by Håkon Høgemø. Gardner is certainly alive to the drama of the tale and his 'Hall of the Mountain King' is superbly caught by Chandos's engineers. Paavo Järvi opens this number more ruminatively but his *accelerando* is thrilling and the voices add a rabble-like clamour to the climax. The 'Death of Åse' is another key moment in the drama and here Gardner is particularly magical in the way he melds the string lines, starting with minimal vibrato before becoming more ardent. Gardner's reading is peppered with such touches – the switch in mood from the 'Abduction of the Bride' to 'Ingrid's Lament' (from Act 2) is masterly, while the 'Morning Mood' that opens Act 4 attains a refreshing simplicity hard to achieve in such well-known music.



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While the choral element is one of the new recording's strong suits, the soloists are a little more variable. In the Anitra of Lise Davidsen Gardner has chosen well, her creamy mezzo altogether more alluring than the edgier Charlotte Hellekant for Paavo Järvi. 'Solveig's Song' is always a test point: Neeme Järvi has Barbara Bonney absolutely in her prime; Camilla Tilling for Paavo Järvi is just a degree less effortless, though her clear tone is a delight; for Gardner we have Ann-Helen Moen, who is touching but doesn't sound quite as confident in the prevarication between sadness and playfulness. But my biggest question mark is over Peer Gynt himself: Johannes Weisser simply sounds too light a baritone for the part, whereas Peter Mattei for Paavo Järvi is altogether more commanding. That said, the closing number of the Chandos set is a highlight, Gardner drawing the music out with all the time in the world, against which his Solveig sings her cradle song with great sincerity.

In the Piano Concerto, Gardner brings to the table flair, drive and an almost Tchaikovskian lushness to the string sound, which matches well Bavouzet's commanding manner in the piano's opening flourish. But there's also a sense of playfulness, for instance in the scampering passagework that follows (at 1'40"), not to mention some fabulous flute-playing (4'18").

It's a more overtly 'symphonic' reading than the superbly lithe one from Howard Shelley (one of my favourites among modern-day recordings) with the Orchestra of Opera North. Bavouzet bewitches in the slow movement, not just in the clarity of his lines but also in the sense of ebb and flow (soloists must love Gardner for his empathetic support); and while no one can spin a slow melody quite like Lipatti, Bavouzet is whirlingly virtuoso in the finale. That said, for me Shelley, with his slightly more pared-back strings and full-on wind and brass, is still more thrilling here. Let's hope that this is the start of a Grieg series for it promises much. **Harriet Smith**

Peer Gynt – selected comparisons:

Gothenburg SO, N Järvi (2/88*) (DG) 477 5433GTA2

Estonian Nat SO, P Järvi (8/05) (VIRG) 545722-2

Piano Concerto – selected comparisons:

Lipatti, Philh Orch, Galliera (10/98*) (EMI) 207318-2

Shelley, Orch of Op North (5/09) (CHAN) CHAN10509

► See The Musician & the Score on page 46

Haydn • Kraus

'Haydn 2032 – No 5, L'homme de génie'

Haydn Symphonies – No 19; No 80; No 81

Kraus Symphony, VB142

Basel Chamber Orchestra / Giovanni Antonini

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA676; Ⓢ ② ● ALPHA677

(78' • DDD)



Fresh from winning the Orchestral category at last

September's *Gramophone* Awards with his previous volume of Haydn symphonies, Giovanni Antonini returns with a new selection and a new band. The Basel Chamber Orchestra present a sound that is a touch sweeter than Il Giardino Armonico's, although that familiar period-instrument 'spit' is still never absent when the *Sturm und Drang* is turned up to 11.

That sweetness suits these later works, in which Haydn's pithy motivic writing is allied to a melodic breadth – whetting the appetite if these Bâloise players are selected to take on the broader canvases of the 'Paris' and 'London' Symphonies. The suave No 81 comes off particularly well, while No 80, one of Haydn's most eccentric creations, is played straight and comes of all the more witty for it. Symphony No 19 is also handsomely done although it seems an odd coupling for the two much later works and might have been omitted from this context to allow for more generous provision of finale second-half repeats elsewhere. (Not that one can really complain in a disc lasting over 78 minutes.) The fourth work is the wonderful C minor Symphony of Joseph Martin Kraus, always worth hearing as perhaps the finest of the *Sturm und Drang* symphonies not from the pen of either Haydn or Mozart (Kraus's exact contemporary, to whom the work was, astonishingly, once attributed).

Symphony No 81 received its first period-instrument recording only last year; compared with Ottavio Dantone and Accademia Bizantina, both here and in No 80, Antonini holds his own in perhaps more considered if less wilfully characterised readings. This is another winning entry into Antonini's Haydn discography, prompting the greedy Haydnista to ask: in which direction will this compelling and tantalising slow-burn series turn next? **David Thresher**

Symphonies Nos 80 & 81 – selected comparison:

Accademia Bizantina, Dantone

(3/16) (DECC) 478 8837DH2

Mahler

Symphony No 4

Hanna-Elisabeth Müller *sop*

Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adam Fischer

AVI-Music Ⓢ AVI8553378 (57' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Tonhalle Düsseldorf,

November 17-21 2016



Adam Fischer launched his Düsseldorf Mahler cycle with an accomplished and

individual account of the nighthawkish Seventh Symphony. I commented at the time that his brother Iván should be looking over his shoulder. More so now. This Fourth is even better. Its Wunderhorn playfulness offsets a knowing old-world charm where phrases turn on a sixpence and all manner of characterful nuance lifts it out of the commonplace.

I love that all the Mahlerian exaggerations and heightened contrasts are in almost wilful defiance of the finesse of the reading. The work's childishness and petulance is an integral part of it and pulling these excitable flights of fancy out of the bag can only be achieved by super-responsive playing. The intricacy of detail here (balance, phrasing, dynamics) makes even the familiar sound new and unexpected. And taking Mahler at his word, edging him out of even his comfort zones, is the key to rekindling its newness. There is a clear trust and mutual respect between Fischer and his Düsseldorf Symphony and not one bar – in marked contrast to the recent Gergiev/Munich account (11/17) – is taken for granted.

As I write I am recalling the pungency of the first-movement climax whose exuberance really is infantile and whose raucousness is dominated by the noisiest child of all – the E flat clarinet – pinging through at the top of its voice. Likewise the sour fiddler of the second movement's spooky dance of death egged on by the spiky klezmer-band clarinet and an awkward bassoon lumbering into the Trio section.

The eiderdown of strings at the start of the slow movement surprises by virtue of the fact that Fischer keeps the sound inward and intimate. In fact he conspicuously avoids an over-gilding of the movement's yearning and actively resists over-emoting. No overt tearing at the heart-strings here. Heaven will come in good time. Even the great E major epiphany is so Disneyesque – cascading strings and harps very prominent – that we instinctively know this to be a child's glimpse of heaven. Mahler, the adult, is more preoccupied with the variants he fashions from his two main themes. Fischer plays with them knowingly.

I like Hanna-Elisabeth Müller's sweet tone and lively storytelling in the finale, the child within us enjoying the prospects of a joyful afterlife while the now agitated sleigh



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bells from the first movement seem to be telling us otherwise. As the music sinks into a contented slumber, one (not least Mahler) is already wondering what it will awaken to.

I eagerly anticipate the rest of this Mahler cycle. I've no doubt that fresh insights will this way come – but better yet I won't know what to expect of them.

Edward Seckerson

Paus

'Odes & Elegies'

A Portrait of Zhou^a. Marble Songs^b. Shostakovich in memoriam^c. Vita^d. Love's Last Rites^e

^aTom Ottar Andreassen ^f/^gJan Bertelsen

^{ob d'amore} ^hBjarne Magnus Jensen ^{vn}

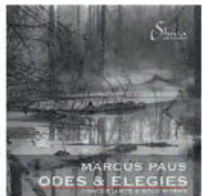
^oEle Erik Ree ^{vc} ^oThe Arctic Chamber Orchestra /

Henning Kraggerud ^{vn} ^aNorwegian Radio

Orchestra / Ingar Bergby; ^oOslo Camerata /

Stephan Barrat-Due ^{vn}

Sheva Contemporary [©] SH174 (43' • DDD)



YouTubers may well be familiar with the name of Marcus Paus as the world's fastest

(electric) guitarist. He has reinvented himself as a successful postmodernist composer, rather successfully too, although former tendencies resurface at times as in the two hectic scherzos of his challenging Cello Sonata (2009; Aurora ACD5076).

Paus has a knack for instrumental writing, as this new release from the Italian label Sheva Contemporary confirms. The pick of the programme is *Marble Songs* for oboe d'amore unaccompanied (2016), inspired by the sculpture of Håkon Anton Fagerås and played with jaw-dropping virtuosity by Jan Bertelsen. Two very different sides of his compositional personality are reflected by the opening flute concertino *A Portrait of Zhou* (2012) – Zhou being a 10-year-old boy Paus encountered in a Chinese theatre company during work on a dance piece – and the bleak and brooding *Shostakovich in memoriam*, reworked from the opening movement of Paus's First Symphony (2006). Both works are equally atmospheric but Tom Ottar Andreassen's flute-playing is enchanting.

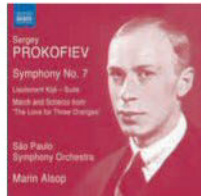
The two violin solos are very different in approach. *Vita* (2014) is strong and compact, performed robustly by Bjarne Magnus Jensen. Henning Kraggerud is rather better known as a violinist, of course, but is given less to work with in the saccharine *Love's Last Rites* (2017). Sheva has produced remarkably consistent sound given each work has five different sets of performers and locations, but it is a shame that the playing time is so short. **Guy Rickards**

Prokofiev

Symphony No 7, Op 131. Lieutenant Kijé – Suite, Op 60. The Love for Three Oranges – Suite, Op 33bis (excerpts)

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Naxos [©] 8 573620 (56' • DDD)



Marin Alsop's Prokofiev cycle has had its ups and downs. A particular highlight

was the generous coupling of the 1947 edition of the Fourth Symphony with *The Prodigal Son*, the ballet project from which it effectively derives (Naxos, 11/13). There was also a certain logic about pairing the wartime Fifth (in a lyrical reading not everyone liked as much as I did) with the rarely heard symphonic suite *The Year 1941* (Naxos, 8/12). Sadly the present issue offers relatively short measure and is not so imaginatively planned.

On the plus side, the conductor does have her own ideas about the Seventh, keeping its first movement on a tighter rein than those recent recordings that seek to make the music bigger or more explicitly Russian, Valery Gergiev's being the broadest of all. Alsop and her production team engineer an interesting focus on counter melodies – the effect is otherwise pleasantly recessed rather than immediate – but there's less in the way of glamour or romance. The Scherzo again feels undercharacterised, at least until a positively supersonic (and dangerously unstable) dash to the finishing line. The slow movement is low-key. The finale, by contrast, risks several pronounced changes of gear, its genial march-like episode almost funereal. That the music's ultimate winding down feels laboured, seeming to miss the innocence of the writing, is probably deliberate. Alsop goes on to include the final flourish we know Prokofiev added unwillingly at a late stage to please the authorities and secure much-needed funds. While her rivals mostly discard this appendage, Naxos would appear to have missed a trick in not providing both versions separately tracked.

Bringing down the curtain with the ubiquitous *Kijé* suite was possibly unwise too, however delicate and ungimmicky the performance. And why the random lollipops from *The Love for Three Oranges*? Sampling, say, *Winter Bonfire* (1950) would have been stylistically and chronologically appropriate as well as usefully gap-filling. In the main work Alsop is always musical but you may crave a fuller, more assertive take on the composer. **David Gutman**

Symphony No 7 – selected comparisons:

LSO, Gergiev (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4

Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (2/16) (MARI) MAR0577

Rautavaara • Ravel • Szymanowski

'Fantasia'

Rautavaara Fantasia Ravel Tzigane

Szymanowski Violin Concerto No 1, Op 35

Anne Akiko Meyers ^{vn}

Philharmonia Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi

Avie [©] AV2385 (48' • DDD)



There are elements of fantasy in both Karol Szymanowski's heady Violin

Concerto No 1 and Maurice Ravel's *Tzigane*, but the title of Anne Akiko Meyers's new disc on Avie refers to what turned out to be Einojuhani Rautavaara's penultimate orchestral work, *Fantasia*. Meyers commissioned this *concertante* piece in 2014 and recorded it just two months before the Finnish composer's death in 2016.

Fantasia is typical of Rautavaara's late style: lyrical, mystical and slow-burning. There's great serenity to Meyers's violin line, floating above rippling strings and arpeggiated woodwinds. It's not music that's in any hurry to reach its destination ... if indeed it knows where its destination lies. Halfway through its 14 minutes, the brass are stirred from their slumber, but it's a momentary awakening. Inevitably one thinks of Finnish landscapes and wide-open spaces where time stands still. It's not instantly memorable music but beautiful nonetheless.

Earthy and rhythmic, *Tzigane* is everything *Fantasia* is not. Meyers tackles the long opening cadenza with sensitivity and is a touch too polite for Ravel's fiery gypsy. There's plenty of style to her playing, though, and her closely recorded pizzicatos pop and sizzle.

Meyers gives a highly persuasive account of Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto, ravishingly supported by Kristjan Järvi and the Philharmonia Orchestra. Swathed in silky tone, Meyers caresses the highly perfumed solo line in sensuous fashion, injecting just the right amount of heat into the cadenza that opens the third movement. Her strong account joins Nicola Benedetti's and Tasmin Little's excellent recordings but both those discs have much stronger makeweights: at just 48 minutes, this new disc offers decidedly short measure.

Mark Pullinger



Marin Alsop continues her Prokofiev cycle with the Seventh Symphony

Szymanowski – selected comparisons:

Benedetti, LSO, Harding (6/05) (DG) 987 0577GH

Little, BBC SO, Gardner (10/17) (CHAN) CHSA5185

Saint-Saëns

Cello Concertos – No 1, Op 33; No 2, Op 119.
Allegro appassionato, Op 43. Carnaval des animaux – Le cygne. Romance, Op 36. Suite, Op 16bis

Gabriel Schwabe vc

Malmö Symphony Orchestra / Marc Soustrot

Naxos (M) 8 573737 (66' • DDD)

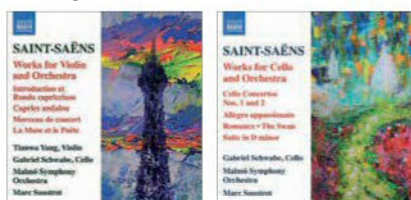
Saint-Saëns

Caprice andalou, Op 122. Havanaise, Op 83.
Introduction et Rondo capriccioso, Op 28.
Morceau de concert, Op 62. La Muse et le poète, Op 132^a. Romances – Op 37; Op 48

Tianwa Yang vn ^a**Gabriel Schwabe** vc

Malmö Symphony Orchestra / Marc Soustrot

Naxos (M) 8 573411 (67' • DDD)



I think these two discs are rather good. No. Rephrase that. I think they are exceptional. The point is that too many recordings on

the Naxos label – and these are prime examples – are taken for granted: little publicity, unknown soloists, second-rank orchestra, unknown conductor. Who is going to pick this up and say that, actually, these performances and the recording quality are up there with the very best and, in some instances, surpass their rivals? Substitute Mrs Star Name for Tianwa Yang and Mr Star Name for Gabriel Schwabe and I suspect there would be greater interest and a very different critical reaction. Apart from that, it is rare to find a disc with almost all of Saint-Saëns's works for violin and orchestra (apart from the concertos) on a single disc; and I have not found another anywhere that has his complete works for cello and orchestra.

The new disc of the latter is presumably intended by Naxos to be a replacement for one over 20 years old with Maria Kliegel and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta of blessed memory featuring exactly the same repertoire but with the 3'05" addition of a version for cello and orchestra of the Romance in F, Op 36 (1874). I was very taken by Gabriel Schwabe (*b1988*). So often the opening of the Cello Concerto No 1 comes across as hectic and blustering; likewise the *Allegro appassionato* can be merely breathless and brilliant. Schwabe

plays with a light heart and produces a light, airy tone to match, combined with a nonchalance and poise that I found most attractive (I'd love to hear him in the two Vieuxtemps concertos). And if the first four of the Suite's five movements are not Saint-Saëns's finest hour, the concluding Tarentelle should surely be heard more often. To this, Marc Soustrot brings an irresistible élan and punch to proceedings.

Schwabe is also the cello duettist with Tianwa Yang in *La Muse et le poète* on the violin disc. Yang is another young artist who deserves to be more widely known (though fiddle fanciers will no doubt have swooped already on her complete Sarasate works for violin and orchestra, also on Naxos). She has such a sweet tone (try the opening of the *Havanaise*) and her performance of the less familiar *Morceau de concert* made me properly register the work for the first time. For pure bravura, listen to the coda of the *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso*, which is dispatched with a speed that almost matches Heifetz (1935 with Barbirolli), and with astonishing articulation and even great clarity. I might add that for both discs the producer, engineer and editor is Sean Lewis. A tip of the hat to him and all concerned. **Jeremy Nicholas**

R Strauss

Ein Heldenleben, Op 40.

Tod und Verklärung, Op 24

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Farao © B108092 (71' • DDD)



This is the second release in a projected survey of Strauss tone poems from Kent Nagano and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. On the whole, I find it more persuasive than the first – an efficient but slightly underwhelming account of *Eine Alpensinfonie* (A/16).

Nagano's *Heldenleben* has a similar focus on the intimate, a reluctance towards grandstanding and an impressive sense of coherence, but the results feel more satisfying in this more overtly personal score. There's no shortage of *Schwung* as we get under way, and the critics carp away at a bracingly swift tempo, with the conductor creating a nice sense of shadowy foreboding. What is perhaps most memorable is the disarming gentleness and tenderness elsewhere that often comes through, not least because of violin solos that present the Hero's Companion more as a brilliantly mischievous and mercurial human being than as a dramatic character (a list of orchestral players leads one to assume this is first concertmaster Sara Trobäck, even though she doesn't get an individual credit).

The great love scene is mellow rather than ecstatic, while the battle, tautly marshalled by Nagano, never really seems to present a real threat. There's a slight soggy to some of the textures, and certain elements are deliberately held back – the big unison trombone line at just after fig 71 (track 6, 3'23") is marked *fortissimo* but creeps in almost inaudibly here. The final minutes, though, are very movingly done, capping what adds up to a satisfying, refreshing performance.

Both in *Heldenleben* and *Tod und Verklärung*, however, one notices that Farao Classics' sound, though detailed and analytical, can also be rather fussy and multi-stranded: we rarely get the sense of the Gothenburg band fully coalescing into a Straussian orchestra in full swing (Karajan's Berliners offer a benchmark in that regard). In the earlier work, too, Nagano feels a little reluctant in the livelier passages – where the strings can sometimes sound a little tired. There's plenty of atmosphere, though, and he gauges the final climax expertly.

Hugo Shirley

Tchaikovsky

Complete Symphonies. Manfred, Op 58.

Francesca da Rimini, Op 32. Serenade for

Strings, Op 48

London Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vladimir Jurowski

LPO © 7 LPO0101 (6h 5' • DDD)

Recorded live 2004-16. Manfred from LPO0009

(8/06); Symphonies Nos 1 & 6 from LPO0039

(11/09); Nos 4 & 5 from LPO0064 (12/12)



Good things, they say, come to those who wait. The first instalment of

Vladimir Jurowski's Tchaikovsky cycle – the *Manfred* Symphony – was recorded live in December 2004, one of the early releases on the London Philharmonic Orchestra's own label. The numbered symphonies were well received in these pages, praised for their 'imaginative spark and spontaneity' (Andrew Achenbach on No 1) and 'fierce intensity' (Edward Seckerson on No 5). With the *Little Russian* Second and the *Polish* Third recorded in the Royal Festival Hall in 2016, Jurowski's cycle finally reaches completion. I welcome it with open arms, albeit with a clunking caveat. In the meantime though, another Russian heading a British orchestra – Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic – has issued an excellent cycle, providing my comparative listening.

Of those symphonies previously released, a quick recap. Jurowski makes a great case for *Winter Daydreams*. There's crispness to the LPO woodwind-playing and the finale has the infectious spirit of a Cossack dance. Fate looms large over the Fourth, a taut, gripping reading, while the Fifth has an emotional sweep that's easy to get caught up in. The *Pathétique* isn't always consistently moving, although there's a graceful lilt to the 5/4 Waltz and a steady pulse to the tragic finale. Jurowski's *Manfred* is exceptionally fine, full of Byronic angst, even if Petrenko's is a shade more impetuous. The LPO recordings are warm, strings to the fore, with woodwind brilliance only occasionally compromised by the hall's acoustic. Applause is retained after most, but not all, performances.

The *Little Russian* contains joyous music, joyously played. Jurowski harries along the *Andantino marziale* second movement a good minute faster than Petrenko, and the Scherzo is bracing, punctuated by whistling piccolo outbursts. After a grandiose introduction, the finale trips along in buoyant spirits, conjuring up, as Stephen Johnson suggests in his excellent

programme notes, 'the smell of vodka, the twang of balalaikas and the creaking of leather boots'.

The Third is a stranger to many concert halls. Its five movements are infused with dance. Indeed, you're more likely to encounter it (in slightly truncated form) at the ballet, either in Balanchine's *Jewels* or MacMillan's *Anastasia*. It forms the exuberant highlight of Petrenko's cycle, although Jurowski comes close to it for ebullience. The LPO is light on its feet in the *Alla tedesca* and the Scherzo, the latter containing much witty woodwind banter. Jurowski keeps the central *Andante elegiaco* flowing, while the finale – whose polonaise style gives the symphony its (misleading) *Polish* nickname – is full of pomp. Also new to the catalogue are an elegant Serenade for Strings and, recorded in Snape Maltings, a dramatic account of *Francesca da Rimini* that leaves scorch marks.

The caveat? If you're new to Jurowski's cycle, then happily add this to your collection (as long as you have already bought Petrenko and his Liverpoolians, please). However, if you've invested in previous issues, brace yourself. The LPO has no immediate intention – so far as I understand it – of issuing the Second and Third on a separate disc. So if the previous three releases are pining on your shelves to be joined by the *Little Russian* and the *Polish* ... you have to splash out and duplicate five discs. It's a frustrating decision and one that could lose the LPO considerable goodwill. Let's hope the powers that be see sense and offer these two symphonies on a single-disc release because the performances are terrific. **Mark Pullinger**
Symphonies Nos 1-6 – selected comparison:
RLPO, Petrenko (ONYX) ONYX4150, ONYX4162 (oas)
Manfred – selected comparison:
RLPO, Petrenko (NAXO) 8 570568

Tippett

Symphonies – No 1; No 2

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /

Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion © CDA68203 (75' • DDD)



This disc launches the first 21st-century cycle of Tippett's symphonies, and does

so in great style. During the later years of the composer's long life, both Colin Davis (Decca, 7/90) and Richard Hickox (Chandos, 10/94, 4/95) were able to show that early doubts about the viability of Tippett's often intricate polyphonic writing in his orchestral scores were unjustified.

But his official Symphony No 1 (1944-45) – there was a predecessor (1933), later withdrawn – remains a challenge to conductors as well as to recording technology, a challenge which this new version surmounts with polish and panache. Easily the equal of his distinguished predecessors in this repertory, Martyn Brabbins gives maximum weight to the way Tippett turns expectation on its head in the symphony's outer movements. Both end quietly; but while the first sustains its energetic pulsation to the last, the fourth turns its initially exuberant spirit to ashes, its elaborate fugal processes freezing and fragmenting. It remains a startling conception, rooted in the tensions and tragedies of the composer's personal life and offering as bleak a perspective on immediately post-war civilisation as Vaughan Williams would do with his Symphony No 6 (1944-47).

More than a decade later, Tippett's Second Symphony (1956-57) also deals with complex emotional states but his music has evolved to project a more sharply focused balance between harmony and polyphony, dramatising the contrast between obsessive rootedness at one extreme and freely floating arcs of melody at the other. By showing how the central movements complement and balance the outer ones, Brabbins gives

the music maximum cogency. In particular, he shapes the tricky finale so persuasively that its climactic surges of melody and the vibrant cadences in which they find a degree of repose have an affirmative yet ambivalent inevitability that must surely be exactly what Tippett was aiming at. This is remarkable music-making, and recorded with all the appropriate richness of colour and clarity of textural detail. **Arnold Whittall**

► See our interview with Martyn Brabbins on page 24

Virtaperko

Romer's Gap^a. Multikolor^b. Ambrosian Delights^c

^bJoonatan Rautiola bar sax ^aPerttu Kivilaakso vc

^cJonte Knif knifonium Jyväskylä Sinfonia /

Ville Matvejeff

Ondine © ODE1305-2 (72' • DDD)



Among younger Finnish composers, Olli Virtaperko (b1973) certainly ranks among the most striking, as is witnessed by the three concertos on this first disc to be dedicated to his music. Not least *Multikolor* (2014), in which a baritone saxophone pursues its stealthy and eventful course across a single movement of notable timbral

and harmonic resource, even though melodic interest is at a premium. Interesting too that the composer considers *Romer's Gap* (2016) to be 'more concise, more disciplined and more serious', as this work for amplified cello rather sprawls its way through an opening movement whose climactic cadenza all too readily evokes 'classic rock' guitar clichés while its successor audibly delights in iridescent harmonies at the expense of overall cohesion, though the finale at least instils a momentum as it heads to a conclusion of no mean panache. From this vantage, *Ambrosian Delights* (2015) is the most successful of these pieces. Maybe the tube analogue synthesiser that is the knifonium is all too redolent of 1970s funk keyboards, but the rhythmic groove then spacey harmonies of its first two movements link seamlessly into the cumulative build-up of a passacaglia, and the finale pursues an animated course to its almost catchy ending.

As to the performers, Jonte Knif proves the very image of a virtuoso on the instrument which he himself created, while Joonatan Rautiola and Perttu Kivilaakso (formerly of the cello rock band Apocalyptica) similarly leave nothing to chance. Entertaining and not a little provocative in its intent, one might only have wished for greater substance in Virtaperko's music overall. **Richard Whitehouse**

"A DAZZLING PROGRAMME OF STRAVINSKY. A NEW ERA HAS WELL AND TRULY BEGUN FOR THE LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA" THE TIMES

RICCARDO CHAILLY
LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
STRAVINSKY
CHANT FUNÈBRE WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING
LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING
OF STRAVINSKY'S LOST WORK
'CHANT FUNÈBRE' (FUNERAL SONG)

INCLUDING:
LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS (THE RITE OF SPRING)
FEU D'ARTIFICE, OP. 4 (FIREWORKS); SCHERZO FANTASTIQUE, OP. 3;
LE FAUNE ET LA BERGÈRE, OP. 2 (THE FAUN AND THE SHEPHERDESS)

OUT 12 JANUARY

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

FIRST RELEASES FROM ICA

Rob Cowan welcomes a batch of historically significant recordings gathered from the Richard Itter collection



Free, light and ardently expressive: a selection of 1950s BBC recordings show the best of Otto Klemperer

A fascinating new batch of CDs from ICA Classics carries the rider 'First CD Release'; all are billed as BBC recordings and all hail from the Richard Itter collection, a priceless storehouse famed for its archive of British music but that also includes numerous recordings featuring great artists of the past in non-British repertoire. A top priority for me is a four-CD set of recordings showcasing **Otto Klemperer** with the Philharmonia and BBC Symphony orchestras, taped live at the Royal Festival Hall and BBC Studios during 1955 and 1956.

Of special interest is a performance of Debussy's 'Fêtes' with the BBC SO dating from 1955, a prompt to compare it with Klemperer's Berlin Staatskapelle recording of almost 30 years earlier (Archiphon, Symposium). In London, beyond a swift opening, Klemperer slows

the tempo as soon as the woodwinds enter; and although the pulse also eases in Berlin, the contrast is a good deal less marked. In the central processional, the Berlin version is consistently broad whereas in London it starts more quickly then broadens as it proceeds. The same CD features a wonderfully airborne BBC account of Bruckner's Seventh (sample 13'39" into the first movement or 2'14" into the second), not significantly different in outline from other Klemperer Sevenths we have but somehow freer, lighter and more ardently expressive. Comparing Klemperer's EMI/Warner Philharmonia Brahms Second with the version included here – the two performances are barely a month apart – finds parallel differences, extra buoyancy, more luminous textures and faster tempos, and while the mono sound quality isn't a match for EMI's more

analytical Kingsway Hall production, it's still very well balanced.

Beethoven's Second, another BBC SO performance from 1955, finds Klemperer directing a swifter first movement than he was destined to do in the studio with the Philharmonia two years later, the parallels with Haydn more marked than they subsequently were. A Mozart CD includes one of two known Klemperer versions of the Fifth Violin Concerto, this one with Bronislav Gimpel, who years earlier had been Klemperer's concertmaster in Los Angeles. Gimpel's playing is vibrant and forceful, not unlike Heifetz's later account of the same piece, especially in the cadenzas. Fine performances of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and Symphonies Nos 29 and 40 complete the deal, the G minor's finale especially urgent.

Brahms's *Tragic Overture* is not dissimilar to its familiar studio equivalent and Schumann's Fourth Symphony features a first movement that's noticeably more driven than the commercial recording. Viewed overall, what we have here is the Klemperer we already know and love but granted wings and, trust me, you can tell the difference almost straight away.

Of equal value is a two-CD set devoted to 1955-56 concert recordings from the Royal Festival Hall featuring the Philharmonia under **Herbert von Karajan**, including Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. One interesting detail that marks this out from various later Karajan recordings of the piece is in bar 402 in the first movement (around 17'20") where Karajan cues a rhetorical pause just before the final onslaught (Markevitch and Mengelberg are similarly dramatic at this point). He does the same on his commercial Philharmonia recording, where the first movement is notably more broadly paced than it is here. The symphony is followed by a sinuous and exciting *Rapsodie espagnole* and the second disc is taken up with three works by Mozart, the highlight being a personably conversational account of the A major Piano Concerto, K488, with Clara Haskil, an obvious soulmate, both artists playing into each other's hands and the Philharmonia responding like a stellar chamber group. The *Haffner* and *Jupiter* Symphonies combine tonal weight with a palpable sense of excitement (deliriously well received by an extremely keen

audience), the two finales truly going for the burn, the *Jupiter*'s especially.

As for the last of these 'first release' treats, **Guido Cantelli** at the Royal Albert Hall in May 1953 in a programme consisting of Rossini's *Semiramide* Overture, Schumann's Fourth Symphony and Brahms's First parades familiar Cantelli attributes, elevated straightforwardness being the most remarkable of them. Writing in the context of an unusually perceptive booklet note, Keith Bennett (who saw Cantelli perform on numerous occasions) praises the Brahms for its 'studied avoidance of abnormality', rightly in my view. The Rossini is graced with some exceptional playing from the Philharmonia winds and brass, and Cantelli keeps the big climaxes on a tight rein, unlike Toscanini, who noticeably pushes forwards (especially with the New York Philharmonic Symphony). Of the various Schumann Fourths we have from Cantelli, this is in some respects the most impressive, for although the first-movement repeat isn't played (Klemperer includes it) and the sound is fairly constricted, the excellent balance allows us to appreciate some sensitive dovetailing and interconnecting detail that helps make the performance so cogent and memorable.

Also worth mentioning is a 20-CD set, the second of two (the first is being re-pressed) that gathers together some of the highlights of the **BBC Legends** series, the featured artists including Beecham, Toscanini, Stravinsky, Arrau, Richter, Flagstad, Monteux, Gieseking, Segovia, the Borodin Quartet, Britten (conducting Mahler's Fourth Symphony), Flagstad and de los Angeles. Archive classics, all of them. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs Orch Wks (r1955-56)
Philh Orch, BBC SO / Klemperer
ICA Classics **B** ④ ICAC5145



Mozart, Ravel, Tchaikovsky Orch Wks
Haskil, Philh Orch / Karajan
ICA Classics **M** ② ICAC5142



Brahms, Schumann Orch Wks (r1953)
Philh Orch / Cantelli
ICA Classics **F** ICAC5143



Various Cpsrs 'BBC Legends, Vol 2'
Various artists
ICA Classics **S** (20 discs) ICAB5141

Weber

Clarinet Concerto No 1, Op 73^a. Variations on a Theme from 'Silvana', Op 33^b. Grand duo concertant, Op 48^b

Raphaël Sévère *cl*^b **Jean Frédéric Neuburger** *pf*
^aDeutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /
Aziz Shokhakimov

Mirare **©** MIR372 (57' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,
February 15, 2016



Following discs
of Brahms and
Hindemith on
Mirare, Raphaël

Sévère – 21 at the time of this recording – turns to the infectious clarinet works of Weber: the evergreen F minor Concerto, the *Grand duo concertant* and the rather less heavyweight Variations on a melody from the composer's 1810 opera *Silvana*. Sévère's is a silky clarinet tone, fully even across the range, with a satisfying flare (without blare) in the instrument's trumpet-like upper reaches. The concerto here is taken from a concert in Berlin, the piano-accompanied works from 10 days later in studio conditions in Paris.

The concerto traces a passage from darkness to light, the premonitions of *Freischütz* in the opening movement yielding to a central aria of Mozartian grace, all dissolved in the effervescence of the finale. From this showing, Sévère seems happiest in the darker music, exploiting the vocal qualities of his instrument. The finale, though, doesn't quite bubble as it should: indeed, it starts fairly steadily, although it gains speed as it continues. Turn to Fabio Di Càsola and the spirits are much higher, in a more finely nuanced performance throughout the work. The DSO Berlin under 2010 Mahler Competition runner-up Aziz Shokhakimov offer workaday support, no match for Di Càsola's St Petersburg players. Applause is retained.

The workmanlike variations are just the sort of salon music that was so popular in the early 19th century, although the piano does far more than accompany; Variation 4 is a bravura keyboard solo before the two instruments recombine. Jean Frédéric Neuburger is Sévère's ready and willing accomplice but the performance doesn't prove the work to be much more than exam fodder. The real deal is the *Grand duo concertant*, a piece I suspect the two musicians have performed far more often, whether together or apart, and this sonata-in-all-but-name proves the highlight of the

disc: fine music and fine musicians finally gelling, although it took a while for the alchemy to happen. **David Threasher**

Concerto – selected comparison:

Di Càsola, Russian Chbr Philh, St Petersburg, Gilbo
(10/09) (SONY) 88697 37632-2

'Silver Voice'

Bizet *Carmen* Fantasy **Delibes** *Lakmé* – Flower Duet **Dvořák** *Rusalka* – Song to the Moon **Gershwin** *Porgy and Bess* – Summertime **Gounod** *Faust* – Ah, je ris de me voir (Jewel Song). *Roméo et Juliette* – Je veux vivre **Lehár** *Die lustige Witwe* – Viljas Lied **Mozart** *Le nozze di Figaro* – Dove sono i bei momenti **Mozart/Puccini** *Gianni Schicchi* – O mio babbino caro. *Madama Butterfly* – Un bel di vedremo

Katherine Bryan *fl*

Orchestra of Opera North / Bramwell Tovey
Chandos **©** **CHSA5211** (65' • DDD/DSD)



Katherine Bryan's
previous disc, 'Silver
Bow' (11/15), saw
the flautist tackle a

series of string works rearranged for her instrument. Two years later, and having moved from Linn to Chandos, she's released 'Silver Voice', which – you guessed it – takes us to the opera house.

A collection of favourite arias is bookended by fantasies on two of the most popular operas of all, *Carmen* and – inevitably, I suppose – *The Magic Flute*. It's not, however, a disc for opera fans. Bryan's tone is powerful and well focused, if a little breathy, but she and her instrument simply can't offer enough expressivity in 'O mio babbino caro' or 'Un bel di'. Her pallid account of 'Dove sono' makes Mozart's great aria sound prosaic. 'Summertime' sounds far too prim and proper.

Things liven up a little in the Gounod but you can't escape the fact that the trickiest coloratura, which creates a frisson when sung, remains too much of a doddle for a flautist of this calibre. *Rusalka*'s Song to the Moon comes off better, initially sounding as though it could be a discarded slow movement for the *New World* Symphony, as do a gently winding *Lakmé* duet and the *Merry Widow* 'Vilja'.

Of the two fantasies, that on *Carmen* is the most interesting, that on *The Magic Flute* little more than an arbitrary medley, with a few virtuoso variations tossed in for good measure. Both are dispatched with aplomb. Chandos's sound is excellent, as one would expect, giving Bryan a bit of a helping hand in the balance, but this is something strictly for flute fans. **Hugo Shirley**

Grieg's Piano Concerto

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet discusses the evergreen concerto with **Jeremy Nicholas**

You think you know Grieg's Piano Concerto pretty well; you wonder if there is any point in making yet another recording of it – and then along come Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Edward Gardner.

The first two bars of their new recording made me sit up and smile. Why? The famous timpani roll is marked *pp molto < sf*. Rarely have I heard it rendered so dramatically as by the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra timpani player who hits the down-beat of the second bar with a terrific thump to match Bavouzet's declamatory opening A minor chord. 'That's exactly how I wanted it to sound,' says the pianist, whose way of expressing himself is the musical equivalent of Raymond Blanc rhapsodising about a new culinary creation. 'It's not that we wanted to do something deliberately different, but in many recordings I don't hear this *drama*. In that sense, the fact that the Grieg was a new addition to my repertoire paid off. I came with no preconceptions. For instance, look at the fourth bar with the double octave As. They are double-dotted minims obviously linked to the quaver Fs at the end of the bar, but in between, Grieg asks for the A minor arpeggios to be played *stringendo*. It took me a while to work out what on earth he wants – because 99 per cent of my colleagues (I'm terribly sorry) are not faithful to the score.'

There's a second striking difference in bars five and six of the new recording: the two acciaccatura chords are usually played as quasi-quavers. Bavouzet plays them as written. 'Of course, it is extremely risky. When you start a concerto you are usually a little bit nervous, and in most cases you are *very* nervous! You don't want to make a mistake in the opening when you are naked ... so you play it safe. Well, in the performances I gave prior to the recording I took the risk and played those bars as written. Thank God I was successful – otherwise I'd have killed myself'

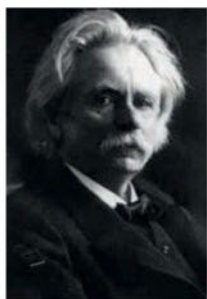
Directly after that, the piano plays a *sforzando* E major chord marked with a pause. Bavouzet and Gardner really do pause. 'I stole it! I stole it!' admits Bavouzet. 'From the remarkable recording of Michelangeli in the 1940s, which was a revelation to me much more than the Lipatti one. It makes it operatic. It says, "What you have just heard is the basic mood of the piece." And the beauty of it is, after the music has taken you by the neck it then whispers in your ear, "Listen to me." It doesn't scream or cry.'



Bavouzet at the composer's piano at the Grieg museum, Trolldhaugen, June 2017

We have been speaking for nearly a quarter of an hour and we have reached bar seven. 'We won't look at every bar,' Bavouzet assures me, 'but this opening is really very difficult to read. Look, I play Boulez sonatas and Stockhausen. Very difficult pieces. But *this – is – difficult!*' Tempo relationships are crucial. Throughout the first movement, Grieg asks for a plethora of tempo changes – *poco rit*, *stringendo*, *rit*, *poco ritard* and so on. 'These have to be judged very well,' says Bavouzet, 'or it all falls into small pieces.'

I mention another moment when the timpani are noticeably more prominent than usual: the brass and percussion *ff* triplets in the *tutti* at letter E. 'You touch on a major point of



The historical view

Edmund Neupert

The concerto's dedicatee writes to Grieg after playing the premiere in Copenhagen, 1869

Even as early as the cadenza in the first movement the public broke into a real storm. The three dangerous critics – Gade, Rubinstein and Hartmann – sat in the stalls and applauded with all their might.

Grieg

Account of Liszt's reaction after sightreading the piece in 1870; letter quoted by HT Finck (1909)

'Keep steadily on. I tell you, you have the capability, and – do not let them intimidate you! This final admonition was of tremendous importance to me; ... it ... seemed to give it an air of sanctification.

George Bernard Shaw

The Star, March 3, 1890

[Agathe Backer Grøndahl] came to the Crystal Palace in clouds of boreal snow. I should not have minded her bringing the snow if she had left Grieg's concerto at home ... [Her] powers of interpretation are wasted upon a scrappy work like Grieg's.


this recording,' says Bavouzet. 'For me the timpani have an absolutely major role all the way through. Literally from A to Z. Wait till the end, you'll see what I mean! Oh, and look,' Bavouzet is unstoppable, 'six bars before the cadenza there is a tremolo in both hands, and here I must pay tribute to the great [Bruno] Leonardo Gelber. He has played this concerto many hundreds of times. I happened to meet him when I was learning it and I told him I found this passage extremely difficult. He gave me this trick: to play it with alternate hands! It gives exactly the same effect but is even more dramatic. It's a little cheat that makes it more pianistic. I am very, very careful about changing a score. In fact, I never do it. If the composer has written it in a certain way then he must have had a reason for doing so. So if Gelber had told me to play it the way it is written, I would have done so.'

No wonder that the Grieg and Rachmaninov Second are two of the most popular concertos. Their shape makes them completely biologically satisfying

The cadenza ends unexpectedly quietly before the orchestra returns *pp*. Grieg marks this Tempo 1. 'No one plays it as marked,' says Bavouzet, 'and for good reason. Ed and I tried it – we did two takes at *tempo primo* and it sounded absolutely ridiculous. It sounds as if you don't care. I should like to ask Grieg if he really meant it and why he didn't write *poco meno al tempo primo*.'

As to the slow movement, Bavouzet has little to say beyond remarking that the apparent novel change of key (from A minor to D flat major) is exactly what Beethoven used in the slow movement of his Piano Concerto No 3, only a minor third higher (C minor to E major); but he draws my attention to a detail I for one had never noticed before: when the main theme returns *fortissimo* and *pesante* in the middle of the movement, the cellos play it in canon.

In the finale, Bavouzet makes an interesting observation about the piano's big upwards scale just before letter A and the orchestra's forceful restatement of the movement's dance theme. 'It's in 2/4, but most conductors add an extra beat for that scale. OK, it's almost impossible to play it as written – there are so many notes [22] – but to make it a 3/4 bar destroys the dance form. I hate it!'

Bavouzet pinpoints several passages throughout the movement that hint at other composers: Chopin, Debussy, Schumann (when the music moves into the tonic major). Finally, we arrive at the big tune, what he calls 'the coronation'. 'Oh, oh, oh!' cries Bavouzet. 'Just look at this! It is marked *Andante maestoso* with the clear indication that exactly one bar of the previous tempo should now become one beat of the new tempo. Lots of people take it much too slow. And now turn to the final bars – an *fff* timpani trill, and then in the last bar another trill marked *ffz* with a pause. It mirrors the very first bar of the concerto! No wonder that the Grieg and Rachmaninov Second are two of the most popular concertos. Their shape – their architecture – makes them completely biologically satisfying. I deeply think that the intellectual form of a piece has emotional impact. But, of course, you need to be a good composer to know how to put it together!' 

► To read our review of Gardner's Grieg CD featuring Bavouzet turn to page 37



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Richard Bratby welcomes Marc Bouchkov's debut album:

'Ysaÿe's Fantaisie is a substantial proposition whose two movements sweep from storm-tossed grandeur to glittering bravura' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



Alexandra Coghlan enjoys Venice with Capella de la Torre:

'The seductive whirr and crack of the tambourine sets the pace for a disc built around dances' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**

JS Bach • Beethoven • Busoni

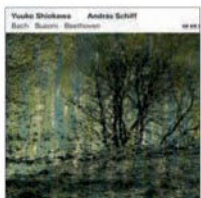
JS Bach Violin Sonata No 3, BWV1016

Beethoven Violin Sonata No 10, Op 96

Busoni Violin Sonata No 2, Op 36a

Yuuko Shiokawa *vn* **Sir Andrés Schiff** *pf*

ECM New Series (P) 481 5767 (76) • DDD



Is it really more than 15 years since the previous ECM collaboration between

violinist Yuuko Shiokawa and her pianist husband Andrés Schiff? One does not often hear the Bach violin sonatas with piano accompaniment these days, but Schiff's firm legato phrasing in the first movement provides both foil and anchor for the florid understatement of Shiokawa's contributions. If Schiff's fussy emphasis of the *Allegro* main theme's first note (and similar places) slightly thwarts the music's jolly demeanour, the *Adagio* reveals a rare congruency between the piano's right-hand chords and the violin's double-stops, while the toccata-like finale is light and propulsive at the same time.

Although Busoni's large-scale Violin Sonata No 2 remains on the repertoire's fringes, it's been surprisingly well served on disc, with quite a few divergent interpretations to consider. An earlier *Gramophone* critic described the slow first movement as mostly sombre and austere, yet the intimate, line-oriented transparency that Shiokawa and Schiff achieve casts the music in sunnier, more optimistic light. The *Presto* is a whirling tarantella but you wouldn't know that from their sedate and soft-grained treatment; no match for the virtuoso flair and fiery inner core of the recording by Joseph Lin and Benjamin Loeb (Naxos, 10/07). The *Andante* is gorgeous and sensitively integrated; listen to how seamlessly Schiff picks up Shiokawa's descending line at the end of bar 333, for example. The musicians unify the closing set of variations (based on a theme of Bach) with smooth transitions and

assiduous tempo relationships, yet their held-back, over-pointed rhythms in the *Alla marcia* lack the abandon of the Enoksson/Stott traversal (BIS), and the closing *Allegro* yields to Zimmermann/Pace (Sony, 7/06) for joyful exultation.

The trilled main theme in the first movement of Beethoven's G major Sonata may be self-consciously tapered (you can increasingly predict the effect as the music proceeds), yet the rarefied ensemble values cannot be denied. In the *Adagio espressivo* variations the plangent qualities of Schiff's piano come into their own. (Is this an old Steinway or a Bosendorfer? No information is given.) The Scherzo gains nervous energy through sharp accents and minuscule accelerations, while the *gemütlich* geniality that Dumay and Pires (DG, 12/02) bring to the *Poco allegretto* contrasts with the Shiokawa/Schiff duo's diverse articulations and phrase groupings. An attractive release, notwithstanding my quibbles, abetted by ECM's customary sonic excellence and Misha Donat's informative notes. **Jed Distler**

JS Bach

Musikalisches Opfer, BWV1079. Goldberg

Variations, BWV988 - Aria. Fourteen

Canons on the Goldberg Ground, BWV1087.

Trio Sonata, BWV1038

Masaaki Suzuki *hpd* **Kiyomi Suga** *fl*

Ryo Terakado *vn* **Yukie Yamaguchi** *vn/va*

Emmanuel Balssa *vc*

BIS (P) BIS2151 (72) • DDD/DSD



Recordings of the *Musical Offering* often make much of the order in which it is

played. The authority of Bach's own printed order is questionable, and he may well not have conceived the 'work' as something to be performed in its entirety anyway. Still, the habit of listening to a CD from beginning to end has not quite died out just yet, so it is worth noting that the

Bach Collegium Japan make their own order by starting with the canons 1-6, following that with the two *ricercars* separated by the 'Canon perpetuus super Thema Regium', the two 'seek and you shall find' canons, the trio sonata and finally the 'Canon perpetuus'. Starting with canons and then holding some back for later certainly seems a good way of making them a central thread, but I'm not sure listeners would always want to hear the two *ricercars* so close together, especially when they are both played on the harpsichord. But then that's what the 'programme' button is for, isn't it?

The instrumentarium here is basically that required for the trio sonata – flute, violin, cello and harpsichord – though with a viola or extra violin added in a couple of the canons. Masaaki Suzuki's readings of the *ricercars* find a workable balance between forward momentum and textural lucidity, the trio sonata is tasteful if cool, and the canons are played with exemplary clarity (and I do rather like the way the Canon 5 'per tonos' eases its way stealthily up through its modulations).

This *Offering* clocks in at 53 minutes, leaving plenty of room for further contrapuntal cleverness in the 14 *Goldberg* Canons (the BCJ players a little more playful here), and a final helping of less compositionally intense Bach in the form of his *galant*-tinged Trio Sonata, BWV1038. BIS's recorded acoustic is perhaps a little 'big' for such intimate music, though at no cost to transparency or attractiveness. **Lindsay Kemp**

Brahms

Clarinet Trio, Op 114^c. **Horn Trio**, Op 40^b.

Piano Quartets^c - No 1, Op 25; No 2, Op 26; No 3, Op 60. **Piano Trios** - No 1, Op 8 (original and 'revised versions'); No 2, Op 87^d; No 3, Op 101^e; *Op posth*. **String Sextets** (arr Kirchner) - No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 36

Gould Piano Trio with ^a**Robert Plane** *cl*

^b**David Pyatt** *hn* ^c**David Adams** *va*

Champs Hill (S) (P) CHRC129 (6h 49' • DDD)

From Quartz ^dQTZ2011 (4/05), ^eQTZ2042



Warmly affectionate: the Gould Piano Trio, with viola-player David Adams, recording Brahms in the Music Room at Champs Hill in West Sussex



The Gould Piano Trio recorded Brahms's piano trios between 2004 and

2007, beginning with the three published works, then adding the Horn and Clarinet Trios, the posthumously published A major Trio (attributed to Brahms) and the original version of Op 8. All were made in the Music Room at Champs Hill in West Sussex for release on the Quartz label, and warmly reviewed in these pages. In 2009 Quartz bundled them all up in a box (QTZ2067), and now they're being reissued yet again by Champs Hill Records, coupled with brand-new recordings of the piano quartets and Theodor Kirchner's trio arrangements of the string sextets.

The older recordings deserve to retain a place in the catalogue. There are more viscerally exciting and daringly imaginative versions available, certainly, but the Gould are unfailingly musical, and whatever their performances may lack in dazzle and pyrotechnics is made up for in lyrical intensity. Some of the performances really catch fire. The first movement of Op 101

maintains a white-knuckle grip without any sacrifice in emotional warmth, and both the Clarinet and Horn Trios are passionately played. In general, however, the Gould go for the slow burn, giving thoughtful, patient interpretations that allow them the space to excavate rich details of articulation and tone colour.

These new recordings of the piano quartets, with viola player David Adams, adhere to the same musical values and are even more introspective than their predecessors. There's hardly a trace of virtuoso extravagance or muscle-flexing, particularly in the popular G minor Quartet, where other ensembles put on quite a show – try Argerich, Kremer, Bashmet and Maisky (DG, 4/04). Tempos are leisurely throughout and the musicians dig deeply into their lines, drawing out an attractively rich, dark sound. Yet there's marvellous clarity, too, even in thick passages, so that one can, say, feel the subtle tension when Brahms overlays rhythms of duplets and triplets, as at 5'11" in the opening *Allegro*. Occasionally the pace seems a little too relaxed. Surely, for example, the syncopated viola line at 6'22" is meant to suggest greater agitation than it does here.

The *Andante con moto* moves sluggishly, not so much because of the slowish tempo but rather because of a dogged emphasis on the moving quavers. And the final *Rondo alla zingarese* is still more disappointing. Its gypsy flavour doesn't have to be laid on thick but the Gould's version is seriously under-seasoned.

The A major Quartet is more successful. Listen to the glorious sequence at 8'33" in the first movement for a shining example of the Gould at their absolute best – intensely expressive, with glistening tone that yields exquisite clarity. Again, there are moments of insufficient energy or drive, as at 10'01", where there's no acknowledgement of Brahms's *appassionato* marking. But the *Poco adagio* is ravishing in its poise and tender feeling; the main theme seems to float along, despite the intricate figuration. And if the finale is not quite rollicking, at least there's snap to the rhythms and a sense of fun.

The highlight of this set is the C minor Quartet, which is given a reading of orchestral weight and authority. The Gould don't jump on the Scherzo's syncopations as others do, and they keep the long chains of quavers in the finale from racing away. In fact, they hold all the

tempos on an extremely tight rein, producing a feeling not just of firmness but of granitic resolve. One comes away from the performance with the impression that this may be Brahms's darkest work – more tragic even than the *Tragic Overture*.

What a pleasure, then, to move back into the sunlight with the two string sextets, skilfully arranged for trio by Brahms's friend Theodor Kirchner, and especially in such warmly affectionate performances. Tempos all seem spot-on here, and every phrase is imbued with character and charm. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Chausson · Ysaÿe · Bouchkov

Bouchkov Fantasy. Melody **Chausson** Poème, Op 25 **Ysaÿe** Solo Violin Sonatas, Op 27 – No 5; No 6. Fantaisie, Op 32. Légende norvégienne. Si vous saviez

Marc Bouchkov *vn* **Georgiy Dubko** *pf*

Harmonia Mundi harmonia#nova

HMN91 6106 (77' • DDD)



In a sense, there are three artists on this disc from Marc Bouchkov and

Georgiy Dubko. This isn't just a thoughtful and imaginatively conceived recital programme; it's a full-blown love letter to Eugène Ysaÿe. Everything here takes Ysaÿe as its starting point: his own music, naturally – including the Fifth and Sixth Sonatas for violin solo – but also Chausson's *Poème*, which enshrines the soul of Ysaÿe's playing, and two slight but touching unaccompanied homages to the master by Bouchkov himself.

But the main story here is what Bouchkov believes are the premiere recordings of two fairly sizeable *concertante* works by Ysaÿe. *Légende norvégienne* is an enjoyably melodious folk-song fantasy that somehow comes out sounding almost Hungarian. The *Fantaisie* is a more substantial proposition whose two movements sweep from storm-tossed grandeur to glittering bravura. Bouchkov is more than on top of its technical demands, and adds as a bonus a transcription of an unpublished song, which the pair play with eloquent sweetness.

In fact, the playing throughout is well suited to this music. French-trained Bouchkov has an unmistakably Gallic sound – fierce and tight at the top, full-blooded and sultry at the bottom – and he takes a real delight in Ysaÿe's rapid-fire shifts of musical character. I particularly liked the way his twilit, 'covered' tone started to shine and then blaze in the 'L'aurore' movement of the Fifth Sonata.

Dubko is an alert and sympathetic partner, though he doesn't quite match Bouchkov's sense of fantasy – more colour wouldn't have gone amiss in the rather pedestrian piano reductions of the orchestral accompaniments to the *Fantaisie* and *Poème*. In fact, a full orchestral recording of some of these rediscoveries wouldn't go amiss, either. Hyperion, are you listening?

Richard Bratby

Fauré · Franck · Prokofiev

Fauré Violin Sonata No 1, Op 13 (arr Bezaly)

Franck Violin Sonata (ed Rampal)

Prokofiev Flute Sonata, Op 94

Sharon Bezaly *fl* **Vladimir Ashkenazy** *pf*

BIS (P) BIS2259 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Instrumental soloists have long coveted sonatas and concertos for other instruments.

Flautist Sharon Bezaly's new disc contains three sonatas, two of which have been purloined from the violin repertoire. César Franck's Violin Sonata was transcribed by the great French flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal, while Bezaly herself is responsible for the arrangement of Gabriel Fauré's A major Sonata. The third sonata on the disc – by Prokofiev – was originally for flute but is now arguably better known in the composer's own violin incarnation, prepared with the help of David Oistrakh.

I'm not completely convinced that either the Franck or the Fauré works in transcription. Rampal's arrangement of Franck's score has to raise many phrases an octave because the flute cannot plumb to a G, while double-stopped notes cannot be replicated, minimising impact. Balance problems are created in both because, at *fortissimo*, the flute just cannot dominate the piano the same way a solo violin can. Bezaly's pianist is none other than Vladimir Ashkenazy, who is ever sensitive but is noticeably placed towards the background to disguise the mismatch.

Bezaly's playing is attractive, strong *in alt*, with quicksilver precision and a fabulous trill to close the second movement of the Franck Sonata. Her dusky tone and pastel colours suit the beautiful *Allegretto poco mosso* finale, although some of the movement's bittersweet quality is lost on the flute. I prefer her recording to James Galway's, though, who forces his tone and applies ungainly vibrato. In the Fauré, the inner movements work best, with the flowing 9/8 *Andante* most persuasive while the cheeky avian quality of the flute brings

off the *Allegro vivo* movement delightfully, with tongued pizzicato and key-slap effects.

The Prokofiev sonata – unsurprisingly – comes off best. Bezaly displays precise staccato and nails top notes, her upwards chromatic runs in the boisterous Scherzo joyously vaulted. Her tone isn't as lustrous as Emmanuel Pahud's but she captures the sincerity of the *Andante* just as well. The high-spirited finale is suitably exuberant.

Mark Pullinger

Franck, Prokofiev – selected comparison:

Galway, Argerich (11/75⁸) (RCA) 09026 63441-2

Prokofiev – selected comparison:

Pabud, Kovacevich (5/00) (EMI/WARN) 556982-2

Fitkin

Servant. Inside. A Small Quartet.

Another Small Quartet. String. Pawn

Sacconi Quartet

Signum (P) SIGCD518 (72' • DDD)



Hard on the heels of their marvellous NMC release of John McCabe

(12/17), the ever-impressive Sacconi Quartet have turned their attention to another outstanding British composer, Graham Fitkin (b1963). Their new Signum issue collects all six of Fitkin's works for string quartet (he does not number them), ranging from the substantial and complex single-span structures *Pawn* (2004) and *Inside* (2006) to the tiny *A Small Quartet* (1993) and its briefer sequel, *Another Small Quartet* (1994).

The works are presented for maximum musical impact and contrast, coincidentally starting with the earliest, the drivingly rhythmic *Servant* (1992). Structurally relatively straightforward, *Servant* is typical of Fitkin's output in its expressive and musical focus, specific elements worked out thoroughly without becoming relentless or obsessive. Sometimes incorrectly labelled a minimalist, there are yet facets of the 'New Simplicity' and its processes in Fitkin's pieces but there is a lot more besides, as the largest work, *Inside*, eloquently demonstrates. It is the subtlest composition of the six, building up in layers within a simple arch-like form.

In many respects, *String* (2007) is the most outwardly appealing of the major items here and in the booklet fellow-composer Laurence Crane comments on its unusual position in Fitkin's catalogue. The musical discourse does have a light-filled demeanour where, by contrast, that of *Pawn* is darker, bleak even, less easily

assimilable as a whole. The Sacconi Quartet, for whom the medium-length *String* was composed, play throughout with élan and what sounds like a complete understanding of the ebb and flow of each of these quite diverse pieces. Mike Hatch's recording, made at All Saints' Church, East Finchley, is warm and beautifully focused on the ensemble as a whole. A terrific disc that I encourage everyone to buy.

Guy Rickards

Franck · Chausson

Chausson *Chanson perpétuelle*, Op 37^a

Franck String Quartet

^aKarine Deshayes *sop* ^aJonas Vittaud *pf*

Zaïde Quartet

NoMadMusic © NMM044 (50' • DDD • T/t)



The Quatuor Zaïde, who caused a bit of a stir last year with their recording of Haydn's

Op 50 Quartets (3/16), now turn their attention to Franck's D major Quartet, his only work in the form. Premiered in 1890, months before his death, it was one of only a handful of his works to achieve public and critical success in his lifetime. Posterity, however, has tended to prefer the greater

volatility of Franck's Piano Quintet to the Quartet's more considered exploration of emotion and form: written in conscious awareness of the traditions it seeks to redefine, this is music that can seem studied if not carefully handled.

The Zaïdes, however, play it with palpable commitment and an understated sense of drama that make it very immediate. The first movement's conflicts between assertion and reflection are finely judged, and there's real sense of malign magic in the Scherzo as its gestures in the direction of Mendelssohn's fairy music and Berlioz's Queen Mab are threatened by jolts and pauses. The *Larghetto* is all chromatic unease and the finale, indebted to Beethoven, bristles with tension without losing sight of Franck's complex counterpoint. Some might prefer the lucid beauty of the Fine Arts Quartet or the greater weight of the Dante Quartet here but this is a fine and consistently engaging interpretation nevertheless.

The coupling is unusual. Where the Fine Arts opt for the Piano Quintet (with Cristina Ortiz, a superb performance) and the Dantes offer us Fauré's String Quartet, the Zaïdes are joined by Karine Deshayes and Jonas Vittaud for Chausson's *Chanson perpétuelle* for mezzo and piano quintet. This is Deshayes's second recording of the

work, and the nuanced restraint and elegance of her earlier version, with the Ensemble Contraste for Aparté, is perhaps preferable to her more overtly intense interpretation here. It's beautifully played, though, and the disc as a whole admirably consolidates the Zaïdes' growing reputation. **Tim Ashley**

Franck – selected comparisons:

Dante Qt (10/08) (HYPE) CDA67664

Fine Arts Qt (2/10) (NAXO) 8 572009

Kancheli · Schnittke

G

'Light over Darkness'

Kancheli Piano Quartet, 'In l'istesso tempo'

Schnittke Piano Quartet. Piano Quintet

Erato Alakiozidou *pf* **Lutosławski** Quartet

Odradek © ODRCD341 (55' • DDD)



The Piano Quintet is one of Schnittke's darkest, most haunting works. It takes

existential angst to a pitch at which Shostakovich and Mahler would have given up, and then, miraculously, resolves it in a stunningly simple apotheosis. While the work has in some sense an arguably fuller expression in its orchestral reworking as *In memoriam*, the sheer intensity of this



Dame Evelyn Glennie © James Callaghan

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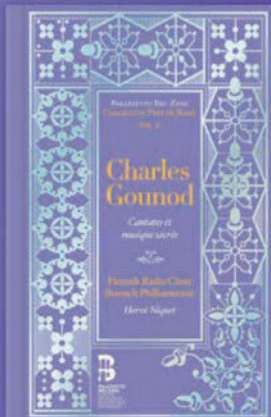
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Elegant and eloquent: Ronald Brautigam partners cellist Christian Poltéra in Mendelssohn

chamber version is utterly gripping, and the combination of the young Greek pianist Erato Alakiozidou and the Lutoslawski Quartet is electrifying. They treat the music with reverence, certainly, but they are also not afraid to mould it, to take it and make its very personal pain their own. It is not every pianist who can make the obvious waltz-like gestures of the second-movement *Tempo di valse* resonate as Alakiozidou does, and not every string quartet who – and here one thinks of the intensity of the Penderecki of the 1960s – can bring such tension to a cluster resolving on to a unison.

More than this, there is a sense of the overall shape of the work, an awareness of the details that go to make up the whole, that is truly astounding – one of the most amazing moments is the descent into sheer blackness at the end of the third movement, with the sudden shaft of light provided by a simple major chord. Odradek's magnificent recording has much to do with this, of course, but such a breathtaking performance would, I think, survive in a much worse acoustic environment. My one reservation has to do with the balance of the piano and the string quartet in the last movement (something which is in any case better achieved between organ and orchestra in the reworking): the piano seems a trifle overwhelmed too soon. But

it's a small quibble. The brief 1988 Piano Quartet is a fight between Schnittke and Mahler, upon whose incomplete work for this medium it is based. Schnittke wins, of course, but the earlier composer casts his shadow over the whole work.

Complementing the two Schnittke works is the piano quartet *In l'istesso tempo* by Giya Kancheli. A work of elegant mournfulness, it is the perfect companion here, and performed with tremendous sensitivity. This is a recording of extraordinary quality, the brilliance of the performers' insight being fully matched by the outstanding quality of the sound, and there are excellent booklet notes by Hugh Collins Rice.

Ivan Moody

Mendelssohn

Variations concertantes, Op 17. Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 45; No 2, Op 58. Song Without Words, Op 109. Assai tranquillo (Albumblatt)

Christian Poltéra *vc* Ronald Brautigam *pf*

BIS (P) BIS2187 (60' • DDD/DSD)



It's fair to say that the world is not short of Mendelssohn cello-and-piano recital recordings. But although Poltéra and Brautigam aren't taking us down any

lesser-trodden repertoire paths here, this is an outstanding disc.

For a start the performances themselves are very fine. Poltéra brings a storyteller's big-picture shaping to movements and pieces as a whole, a wide dynamic range and, at the micro-level, consistently beautiful phrasing and shading. Brautigam's playing is every bit as enjoyable with his nimbly elegant and eloquent partnering.

What really sets the seal on the disc's overall distinctiveness, however, is the wider-angle view, beginning with the instruments themselves. In fact, Poltéra's 1711 'Mara' Stradivari cello has a star quality all of its own with its softly gravelly, sonorous depths and the tonal clarity of its upper-register richness. Likewise, while with Brautigam on the ticket it was hardly going to be a surprise to hear the unmistakable tones of a period keyboard, his 1830 Pleyel copy is still a delight; indeed, it's a full-on asset when Mendelssohn's piano-writing becomes almost concerto-like in its bravura, allowing Brautigam to give his all in moments such as Sonata No 1's outer movements without the cello ever being overwhelmed.

The engineering is lovely too. Playable on SACD as well as stereo, the acoustic balance leaves a satisfyingly amount of Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz's Reitstadel

concert hall in the mix, both instruments recorded relatively close, with Poltéra's cello ever so slightly out in front. This does mean you're likely to hear Poltéra's intakes of breath and some fingerboard action, but not to an off-putting extent; and the advantage of this set-up is pizzicatos that jump deliciously out at you. A really classy overall package that comes highly recommended. **Charlotte Gardner**

Pixis

Pixis Grand Piano Trio No 1, Op 75.

Piano Trio No 3, Op 95

Pixis/A & M Bohrer Trio concertant No 1

Leonore Piano Trio

Hyperion © CDA68207 (65' • DDD)



You'd be forgiven for not being au fait with Johann Peter Pixis, or if you were at all, it

might well be as one of the contributors to Diabelli's multi-composer waltz project or Liszt's *Hexameron*. He was born in Mannheim in the year Mozart wrote his last three symphonies (1788) and died in 1874, the year Mussorgsky composed *Pictures at the Exhibition*. Though Pixis composed prolifically, his music has fallen by the wayside, at least until now: the Leonore Piano Trio have already proved themselves able rescuers of lost works, from Arensky to Lalo. And the three works here demonstrate that Pixis's neglect is somewhat unfair.

They give an energetic account of the opening movement of the First Trio, which is infectious stuff – not just in terms of its catchy main theme but also the way it is decorated with delicious roulades on the piano. They enjoy the folkish elements of the second movement's main theme, which is adroitly developed by Pixis to charming effect. The piano once again leads the way in the introduction to the finale (a dotted figure that unfortunately reminds me of the *Pink Panther* theme), which then lets rip in an effervescent *Presto*, with a chattering interplay between the strings, culminating in a *prestissimo* coda that demands from the pianist an easy brilliance which Tim Horton has in spades.

The Third Trio, in B minor, is altogether more serious – and the piano once again dominates the proceedings in the first movement, Horton giving a fine account of himself. The violin and cello get their moment in the second movement, an engaging march spiced with strutting dotted rhythms, which Pixis then proceeds to vary, to engaging effect. There's the odd

moment of slightly suspect tuning in the violin, but it's not a major caveat. The dashing Scherzo is a highlight, while the way Pixis has the strings sing their melody over rippling piano accompaniment gives the Trio a yearning quality. The jack-in-a-box finale springs into life, its 'Moorish' melody deliciously inauthentic, and again the Leonore give a spirited reading.

There are again moments of slight acerbity to the violin tone in the *Trio concertant* No 1, which is a set of variations on a theme from Onslow's now forgotten opera *Le colporteur* ('The Peddler'). Among highlights is the delightful pizzicato-infused fourth variation, all instruments playing *pianissimo*, as is the move into 6/8 for the final *Allegro*, a complete charmer with more than a whiff of the Biedermeier drawing room. Jeremy Nicholas's typically entertaining and well-researched notes also make the case for Pixis being given a second chance. **Harriet Smith**

Shostakovich

String Quartets – No 7, Op 108;

No 8, Op 110; No 9, Op 117

Altius Quartet

Navona © NV6125 (59' • DDD)



It is curious how rarely these three quartets, written in relatively close proximity (Nos 7 and 8 in 1960, No 9 – along with No 10 – in 1964), are programmed together on disc. Of currently available single-disc alternatives, only the Brodsky's Warner Apex reissue (from their early Teldec cycle) favours the strict numerical sequence.

For the Altius Quartet, it is more than a matter of chronology. They regard these works as a 'personal' triptych, Nos 7 and 9 dedicated to Shostakovich's first and last wives and the Eighth famously his autobiography in music, shot through with self-quotations. There is much in that, although I am not sure I entirely go along with the works' fitting 'an arc of birth, death and revival' – there is a lot more going on than the rather facile description in the booklet suggests – but they do make a case for their interconnectedness. However, so do their rivals.

These are highly competent if not quite first-division accounts. The *Gramophone* Award-winning Emerson play with greater attack ('turbo-charged perfectionism', in David Gutman's memorable phrase, 12/16) and understanding of the music's layers within layers – as do the Borodin. Comparisons of the opening of the *Allegro*

third span of No 7 or the Eighth's 'dance of death' in the *Allegro molto* confirm the greater intensity of the best of their rivals; in the *Adagio* of No 9 they do not match the white heat of the Emerson's playing. Navona's sound is very fine, the recording close-miked but not claustrophobic.

Guy Rickards

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Borodin Qt (3/86⁸) (MELO) MELCD100 1077

Emerson Qt (6/00⁸) (DG) 475 7407DCS

Brodsky Qt (6/92⁸) (APEX) 8573 89093-2

Silvestrov

'Hieroglyphen der Nacht'

2 VI 1810 ... zum Geburtstag RA Schumann^a.

25 X 1893 ... zum Andenken an PI Tschairowskij^a.

Augenblicke der Stille und Traurigkeit. *Elegie*^b.

Lacrimosa. Serenaden^a. Drei Stücke^a. Walzer

der Alpenglöckchen

Anja Lechner vc,^b tam-tam^a **Agnès Vesterman** vc

ECM New Series © 481 5692 (66' • DDD)



This recording of music for cello solo and two cellos by the Ukrainian composer

Valentin Silvestrov is a disc of two halves, as it were. Listeners familiar with the benign beauty that imbues much of Silvestrov's sacred choral works will be in for quite a shock. The opening *Drei Stücke* and three-movement *Elegie* belong to a very different world to the composer's liturgical songs and Alleluia settings (as heard, for example, on the recent, excellent 'To Thee We Sing' – Ondine, 10/15). Edgy and pointillist, the first study (whence the recording's title 'Hieroglyphs of the Night' comes), resembles Anton Webern at his most epigrammatic. The *Elegie*, this time for solo cello, is even more brittle – sounds snatched from the silences that frame them. Alternating between cello and two tam-tams, and brilliantly performed by seasoned Silvestrov cellist Anja Lechner, the final elegy evokes a strange, disembodied ritualistic counterpoint.

The juxtaposition is made to sound even stranger by the familiarity of what follows. Two sets of homages – one to Schumann, the other to Tchaikovsky – demonstrate Silvestrov's oft-quoted comment that his music 'is a response to and an echo of what already exists'. The 'Abendserenade', an arrangement of the 'Evening Serenade' from the composer's *Silent Music*, gives full vent to the first cello's lyrical register, supported by delicate guitar-like pizzicatos on the second.

Perhaps even more surprising is that these two sharply contrasting worlds –

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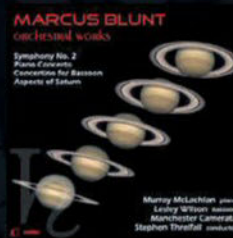
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dissonant, austere and inward-looking on the one hand, exuding a radiant tonal beauty on the other – often coexist in Silvestrov's creative imagination, making it almost impossible to predict what might come next: a 'hieroglyphic' music, formed out of the very layers of history.

Pwyll ap Siôn

'Bohemia'

Dvořák Violin Sonata, Op 57 B106. Four Romantic Pieces, Op 75 B150 **Janáček** Violin Sonata **Suk** Four Romantic Pieces, Op 17 **Tamsin Waley-Cohen** *vn* **Huw Watkins** *pf* Signum © SIGCD510 (74' • DDD)



The heart gives a little leap at the prospect of Dvořák chamber music, especially

when it comes from a duo as engaging and intelligent as Tamsin Waley-Cohen and Huw Watkins. That intelligence is very much at work in this recital, which begins with the intimacies and moodswings of Dvořák's F major Sonata, before progressing through his *Romantic Pieces* to the more expressionist language of the matching set by his son-in-law Josef Suk and then on to Janáček's Sonata, whose quicksilver volatility and conciseness feels, by this point, like part of a continuous tradition.

Waley-Cohen and Watkins articulate that overall narrative beautifully – which is not to say that, as individual interpretations, these are anything other than coherent, lyrical and often extremely lovely. Waley-Cohen's tone is bright enough to carry any climax (listen to the flashing brilliance of Suk's 'Burleska' or the way she tears into the second of Dvořák's *Romantic Pieces*), but its rarest beauties are down on the lower strings: burnished and dusky, with a catch in the throat that makes for some especially affecting quiet moments. Waley-Cohen and Watkins are on the same page: their expressive to-and-fro at the start of the Dvořák Sonata establishes both a real sense of space and the unaffected but always appropriate sense of character that animates all four performances.

Above all, it feels as though these performers have got the scale of this music just right: nothing forced, no obvious straining for effect, just fresh, thoughtful and committed interpretations shot through with poetry and alertness. This is real chamber music. It mightn't blow you off your feet at first hearing but it'll give you more and more as you return to it: which I'm sure you will. **Richard Bratby**

'Homage'

Albéniz/Heifetz Suite española, Op 47 – Sevilla **Bazzini** Calabrese **Debussy/Roques** La plus que lente **Dvořák/Kreisler** Slavonic Dance, Op 46 No 2 **Gluck/Kreisler** Melodie **Kreisler** Gypsy Caprice. Rondino **Mendelssohn/Kreisler** Song Without Words, Op 62 No 1 **Poldowski** Tango **Ponce/Heifetz** Estrellita **Prokofiev/Heifetz** Romeo and Juliet, Op 64 – Masks **F Ries** La capricciosa **Schubert/Kreisler** Rosamunde, D797 – Ballet Music **Schumann/Auer** Widmung, Op 25 No 1 **Scriabin/Szigeti** Étude, Op 8 No 10 **Wieniawski** Caprice alla saltarella (arr Kreisler). Mazurka, 'Obertass', Op 18 No 1 **Vilde Frang** *vn* **José Gallardo** *pf* Warner Classics © 9029 58053-2 (55' • DDD)



For openers Vilde Frang treats us to a chirpy morsel by Franz Ries, *La*

capricciosa, a piece that as a boy Yehudi Menuhin famously recorded, his performance – like hers – playful and romantically inclined. 'Homage' treads a route that leads back to recitals where, after the interval, the greats of yore would follow the last principal work on their programme with musical sweetmeats very much along these lines. Frang occasionally hints at those stylistic prompts, Fritz Kreisler in the *Rondino on a Theme of Beethoven* and Kreisler's transcription of Mendelssohn's *Song Without Words* 'May Breezes', Op 62 No 1 (not so named here), though I wasn't sure about the po-faced, militaristic slant at the start of Kreisler's own *Gypsy Caprice* (marked *Allegretto, molto ritmico*).

Still, all comes right again for Dvořák's E minor *Slavonic Dance*, loose-limbed and expressive playing, with the instrument's higher reaches sounding like imitated birdsong. Jascha Heifetz is brilliantly and wittily evoked in his own transcription of Albéniz's 'Sevilla' and Ponce's *Estrellita*, where Frang's approach is deliciously warm and intimate. 'Poldowski' was the pseudonym of Wieniawski's youngest daughter and her belligerent Tango is redolent more of Szymanowski than of her father, who is represented by two pieces, one of them arranged by Kreisler. All receive winning performances.

Other composers represented include Schumann, Schubert, Scriabin, Prokofiev and Bazzini (*Calabrese* rather than the still-ubiquitous *La ronde des lutins*). We're given Debussy's *La plus que lente* in Léon Roques's sensual arrangement and Heifetz's take on Gluck's 'Dance of the Blessed Spirits', the only performance that didn't really take my fancy, Frang here it

seems hell-bent on marking exaggerated crescendos on certain notes that draw undue attention to themselves (the violin line is marked *piano* for most of the time). The trick here surely is to employ art that conceals art, which Frang usually does and which her greatest forebears always did. Good sound, fine piano-playing from José Gallardo and excellent notes from Andrew Stewart. **Rob Cowan**

'Una serata venexiana'

Anonymous Pan de miglio caldo **Azzaiolo** Come t'aggio lasciato, o vita mia **Barbetta** Moresca quarta detta la Bergamasca **Bassano** Susanne ung jour **Caroso** La Villanella Balletto **Cazzati** Gagliarda detta la Magnani **Colombi** Bergamasca **Falconieri** Passacalle **Gastoldi** Domine ad adiuvandum **Lasso** Susanne ung jour **Montalbano** Sinfonia quarta, 'Geloso' **Ortiz** Recercada Ruggero **Patavino** Dillà dal'acqua. Le pur morte feragu/Venni già la Bergamasca **Piffaro** Di lassar tuo divo aspetto **Rossi** Gagliarda detta la Massara. Sinfonia a 5. Sinfonia grave. Sonata duodecima sopra la Bergamasca **Spiardo** Suono del Ballo de Cigni **Uccellini** Sonata seconda, 'La Luciminia contenta' **Zanetti** Aria del Gran Duca. La Bergamasca **Capella de la Torre / Katharina Bäuml** Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 47011-2 (70' • DDD)



With every disc they release there's something new to like about Capella de la

Torre – oboist Katharina Bäuml's Austria-based early music ensemble. Their emphasis on wind instruments sets them apart from many string-dominated rivals, giving their recordings a wonderful textural richness and variety, recognised last year with an ECHO Klassik award for their 'Water Music'. Their latest project, perhaps their most attractive yet, invites listeners to spend an evening in 17th-century Venice – singing, dancing and passing the time in the convivial company of works by Rossi, Zanetti, Barbetta and more.

The seductive whirr and crack of the tambourine sets the pace for a disc built around dances, from exotic morescas to sprightly bergamasques and stately ricercars. Even the instrumental arias and sinfonias are shot through with rhythmic interest, and there's an exhilaration to such a relentless pulse, to so many circling ground basses.

The other animating force here is the narrative of a musical rivalry between strings and wind (Venice's *piffari* – the town waits – were famous for their skill),



Easy brilliance: the Leonore Piano Trio turn their exploratory attention to the music of Johann Peter Pixis – see review on page 54

with each force striving to outdo the other. A rhetorical Uccellini sonata (*La Lucimonia contenta*) and Montalbano's sinfonia *Geloso* put Anne Schumann's expressive solo violin in the spotlight with their highly inflected arioso-like effects, while Spiardo's *Ballo de Cigni* showcases Hildegard Wippermann and Bäuml's shawms and Flako Munkwitz's sackbut.

Flute and recorder, a resonant dulcian and plenty of percussion add their voices elsewhere to create a programme that wanders from tavern to court to street – even stopping off briefly at a church in Gastoldi's serene *Domine ad adiuvandum* – with blissful ease. Each of the nine-strong ensemble is both consort musician and soloist, and the give and take of this beautifully constructed programme is perfectly calibrated. A quiet contender come Awards season, surely.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Timeless Light'

Grigorjeva Molitva (Prayer)^a. Recitativo

accompagnato Kõrvits Seitse linnu seitse

und (Seven Dreams of Seven Birds) – excs^b

Pärt Pro et contra^c Sink Gospodi, pomilui nas

(Lord, have mercy on us) Tüür Spectrum IV^d

Allar Kaasik vc with ^eKristine Adamaite org

^aEstonian National Male Choir / Mikk Üleoja;

^bState Choir Latvia / Māris Sirmails; ^cEstonian

National Symphony Orchestra / Peeter Lilje

BIS © BIS1887 (81' • DDD)

^fRecorded 1988



You get your money's worth here: Estonia's flagship orchestra, two of the finest choirs in

the Baltics (and, therefore, the world), some truly delicious organ-playing – all that on what is really a disc of cello music. Allar Kaasik has assembled an album of contemporary works for his instrument that offers a more varied view than usual of Estonia's contemporary music scene. He writes in the booklet that any music played in a church takes on the guise of 'Holy Service' and the pacing of his disc has a ritualistic concentration. But the ambiguity of that phase 'holy service' also describes a listening experience with one foot in the spirituality of worship and another in that of humanity and politics.

The recording of Arvo Pärt's *Pro et contra* (1966) was made for Melodiya in Soviet times. I have never heard Pärt like this: frantic and dissonant, almost suffocating before it stumbles (awkwardly, it has to be said) into a culminating chorale. In Tõnu Kõrvits's musical fairy tale *Seven Dreams of Seven Birds* the accompanying ensemble is not orchestra but choir. The selection of

four 'dreams' here preserves the narrative but presents a journey in texture too, ending in exhaled exchanges between the constituent parts.

Galina Grigorjeva's *Prayer* imagines male voices as a heavenly choir high up while Kaasik's cello kneels at an altar; the Slavic thickness of the composer's choral writing (she was born in Ukraine) is pitted against the cello's (originally a saxophone) incantations. Her solo cello piece *Recitativo accompagnato* is a penetrating work with an unsettling ending and we also hear an unaccompanied work by Kuldar Sink, many of whose works were destroyed in the fire that killed him too. His *Lord, have mercy on us* is a fervent piece, not without humour, that finds the light of the major in its final breath.

Most resonant of all is Erkki-Sven Tüür's *Spectrum IV* for cello and organ, which acknowledges that a cello can never play a duet with a large church's organ unless the acoustic consciously acts as a musical intermediary. Rooted in a murmuring pedal note, this highly concentrated piece rises up monstrously before 'ascending to heaven' via the portal of an extraordinary organ chord, magically registered by Kristine Adamaite. Kaasik's playing sounds like an extension of his voice, nothing less and nothing more. One for repeat – or ritualistic – listening. **Andrew Mellor**

Melos Quartet

Tully Potter pays tribute to the German string quartet who were active over a 40-year period from 1965 and highlights some notable recordings

During the 1950s, when the legendary Busch Quartet was no more, and even its records were unavailable, old-timers wondered what sort of group would replace it. In war-torn Germany, such ensembles as the Barchet, the Schäffer and the German-Czech Koeckert quartets kept the pot boiling but faded for various reasons. When the Melos Quartet emerged in Stuttgart in 1965, it was completely different and took everyone by surprise.

Wilhelm Melcher, Gerhard and Hermann Voss and Peter Buck upheld the virtues that had typified their predecessors – a forensic approach to scores and attention to stylistic traits, rhythm, phrasing, ensemble and balance. But the Quartetto Italiano (who influenced the Melos's approach to quartet coaching and were among Melcher's teachers) and the Smetana and Borodin quartets had brought a newly meticulous attitude to quartet playing. Working on chording, on matching of vibrato and bowing and on building intonation upwards from Buck's rock-like cello, the Melos evolved a slightly dry approach which proved highly effective, admirably adaptable to any work where overindulgence would be fatal.

They grew up with German music at a low ebb. Hermann Voss (b1934) and brother Gerhard (b1939) were Rhinelanders, Peter Buck (b1937) was from Stuttgart and Melcher (1940-2005) from Hamburg. The Voss brothers were taught by Schäffer Quartet members Franz Josef Maier and musicologist Franz Beyer, and when Hermann was 16 he heard the Végh Quartet play all the Bartóks and Beethovens. Buck heard the Stross and Koeckert ensembles in his home city – 'Instead of money in those days we brought coal and wood for heating the hall' – but Melcher, bombed out

of Hamburg by Allied raids, mainly relied on the radio. His teacher Erich Röhn played in a trio. Three of the future foursome graduated to orchestras in Stuttgart, and the jigsaw was complete when Melcher, having already led one quartet and studied in Rome with Pina Carmirelli and Arrigo Pelliccia, left the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra to lead the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra.

In 1967 they began recording for Intercord: a fine

Bruckner String Quintet (with viola player Enrique Santiago), Haydn, Mozart, Smetana, Janáček, Wolf and a premature Beethoven cycle – they played only three quartets when they

started. But a 1969 DG contract set them on a starry path: a sprightly LP of Bartók, Kodály and Weiner made critics prick up their ears. The best of the early things is a Cherubini set for Archiv: by playing this lovely music all the time, my old friend Michael Marcus sold dozens of boxes at his London shop. The Brahms and Schumann quartets suited the Melos well, but Mozart, Schubert and Mendelssohn sets

often seem a bit 'tight', although Mozart's *Hunt* Quartet and B flat and F major *Prussian* quartets are terrific. The loveliest Schubert is the C major Quintet with Rostropovich, who had to borrow one of Buck's bows but exerted so much influence that the performance came out very similar to his classic 1963 Russian version (Melodiya). Best of all, in the analogue era, is the 1979 Debussy–Ravel coupling. The riveting readings make up in faithfulness what they lack in Frenchness – tempos are impeccable. Here is the fastidious, minutely prepared Melos style *in excelsis*.

Digital sound brought a second Beethoven cycle, which disappoints only for the players' refusal to let themselves go in slow

When the Melos Quartet emerged in Stuttgart in 1965, it was completely different and took everyone by surprise

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1966 – *Win three prizes the year after forming*

The Melos Quartet represents Germany in the Jeunesses Musicales in Paris, win the international competition in Geneva and takes the prize for best quartet at the Villa-Lobos Competition in Rio de Janeiro.

• 1969 – *Commence relationship with DG*

The quartet initiates two decades with DG, recording Brahms's String Quartet Op 51 No 1 and Haydn's Op 76 No 4. This 'debut' disc is shelved because it is not really a debut – the performances remain unissued. The Brahms is redone in 1972.

• 1970 – *Tour of USSR followed by trips to UK and US*

They tour the USSR. They first come to London for a BBC lunchtime concert in 1972, recording works for later broadcast including a Malipiero quartet not recorded for DG. They revisit Britain regularly and in 1973 make their US debut.

• 1993 – *Introducing a new second violinist*

Gerhard Voss withdraws from the group and Virginia-born virtuoso Ida Bieler becomes second violinist, persuading her colleagues to play Sibelius, Verdi and more Dvořák.

• 2005 – *Death and disbandment*

Wilhelm Melcher, who has battled a crippling physical ailment for years, dies suddenly just before a planned 'farewell tour' and the quartet is disbanded.



movements, especially those of the late quartets – a beautiful account of the Op 130 Cavatina is an exception. The idea of recording pairs of Mozart string quintets with their friends Santiago, Beyer and Piero Farulli came off best in the coupling of K515 and K516 with Beyer, featuring two Gasparo da Salò violas. Beyer contributed an essay showing why the Minuet of K515 must be placed second and the *Andante* third, *pace* the Neue Mozart-Ausgabe.

A highlight of a sojourn with Harmonia Mundi was a wonderfully warm Brahms Op 111 Quintet with Gérard Caussé, recorded in 1990.

The vivacious American Ida Bieler – who took over as second violinist in 1993 and revived the ensemble for a dozen precious years – is fond of the Dvořák quartets and E flat Quintet in which she played.

When I first met these seemingly serious Germans in 1989,

I was amazed to find how much they laughed together. I chided them for playing no Reger quartets, urging Op 109 on them. I am delighted to find a loving performance of that very work, from that very year, among the excellent SWR Digital downloads. I blew part of my fee for this article on the Reger and Hindemith's Third and Fifth, and felt myself well recompensed. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Debussy String Quartet in G minor, Op 10

Kodály String Quartet No 2, Op 10

Ravel String Quartet in F

Melos Quartet

DG Originals

(Debussy & Ravel 11/79; Kodály 5/71)

Instrumental



Rob Cowan listens to an impressive account of Paganini's Caprices:

'Sueye Park counters the cliché of Paganini as devil with an alternative image of a seducer' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 65](#)



David Fanning hears Tchaikovsky-winner Dmitry Masleev:

'This is not merely competition-winning pianism but highly accomplished and communicative musicianship' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 65](#)

Alkan

'Edition'

The major piano works, chamber music, chamber concertos and organ music

Giovanni Bellucci, Alessandro Deljavan, Stanley Hoogland, Vincenzo Maltempo, Laurent Martin, Costantino Mastropirimiano, Mark Viner, Alan Weiss *pf* **Kevin Bowyer** *org* **Trio Alkan; Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto / Roberto Forés-Veses**
Brilliant © 2013 95568 (15h 25' • DDD)

Recorded 1989-2017



This is the first time Alkan has been granted box-set status. It is a remarkable

promotion for a composer who sits below the salt despite the advocacy of many distinguished pianists. Perhaps this collection will help alter that for, with all his eccentric, uneven and often bizarre creations, there can be no doubt that Alkan is one of the very greatest and most important writers of music for the keyboard.

If you are encountering his music for the first time, might I suggest beginning with disc 8. This opens with the first Nocturne, Op 22 (1844), its seductively lovely theme never captured better than here by Alan Weiss on one of the earliest recordings in the collection (originally on Fidelio 8839, 1989). That is one side of Alkan. He follows it with the polar opposite, the brief Toccata, Op 75, one of his last published works, a fiendish 'quasi prestissimo' *perpetuum mobile*. Weiss dispatches it with exuberant aplomb before launching into the three *Chants*, Op 38*a*. Alessandro Deljavan takes over for one of Alkan's most original conceptions, the *Trois Grandes études*, Op 76: No 1 is among the first significant works for the left hand alone (Fantaisie in A flat); No 2 is the mammoth (over 22 minutes) Introduction, variations and finale, one of the very few works ever written for the right hand alone; and No 3, 'Mouvement semblable et perpétuel', is a five-minute rondo-toccata

for both hands in unison which, technically at least, makes the finale of Chopin's B flat minor Sonata seem like a walk in the park. How's that for starters?

To whichever disc you turn, Alkan continually confounds your expectations or surprises you with the unexpected. Try disc 10 with *Une fusée* ('A Rocket'), Op 55, played by Constantino Mastropirimiano on an 1865 Pleyel. Banal? Bonkers? Or a jaw-dropping firework display? Is there another piano work before the late 1850s that features cluster chords? Tracks 7 to 10 contain the extraordinary *Sonatine* in A minor, Op 61, described by Sorabji as 'vehement, droll, gargoyle-like, childlike and naive in turn – almost as though Berlioz had written a Beethoven sonata'.

The *Sonatine* is one of a few duplications of repertoire (though the longest by far) included in this box-set, a strange decision by Brilliant Classics for, though almost all Alkan's best-known and most important works are here, it is a great pity that the *Trois Études de bravoure*, Op 12, 'Fa', Op 38*b* No 2 (from the second book of *Chants*) and *Le chemin de fer*, Op 27 (the first piece of music to simulate a piece of machinery) are absent. The *Sonatine* in Vincenzo Maltempo's performance on a modern instrument (disc 3) aptly follows its predecessor, the equally astonishing *Grande sonate*, Op 33, otherwise known as 'Les Quatre Âges', four movements representing a particular stage in a man's development, each becoming progressively slower.

Not all the music, performances and recording are on such a high level, a case in point being Giovanni Bellucci's horribly aggressive live recordings from 2013 of the three *Scherzi de bravoure*, Op 16. Save yourself for the two sets of studies in all the major and minor keys which, in the words of one of Alkan's foremost champions, Ronald Smith, 'within their 370 [*sic*] or so pages is engraved the most complete evidence of what must have been an almost frightening keyboard command'. Mark Viner gives us the finest account ever committed to disc of the 12 major-key

studies (Op 35), surpassing the excellent Stephanie McCallum (Tall Poppies, 1992). Viner's disc, the most recent recording (2016) of the collection, is also issued singly (Piano Classics PCL10127) with the further bonus of the pianist's own detailed and illuminating booklet (Brilliant's English-only booklet is as good as far as it goes, which is nowhere near as far as the individual booklets for the original issues of all these discs). The mighty 12 minor-key studies (Op 39), at the centre of which is the mind-boggling Concerto for Solo Piano, are allotted to Maltempo. Like all the greatest recordings of this work (Hamelin, Gibbons, Ogdon, Smith), Maltempo swallows it whole with an intense musicality and technique to spare, though he does not dislodge Hamelin from pole position (Music & Arts, 8/93 or Hyperion, A/07 – two of the greatest piano recordings ever made).

What else? Chamber music (Violin Sonata, Cello Sonata, Piano Trio), Laurent Martin playing the 25 *Préludes*, Op 31 (in all the major and minor keys) and the 49 little gems that form *Esquisses* ('Sketches'), Op 63; and then – to wrong-foot you again – a disc of Alkan's organ music from the astounding Kevin Bowyer (a Nimbus disc from 1988) ending with the Impromptu on 'Ein feste Burg', originally for pedal piano. There's much more besides. Over 15 hours of music by 'the most neglected genius of the 19th century' – and all for the price of a good single malt. **Jeremy Nicholas**

JS Bach

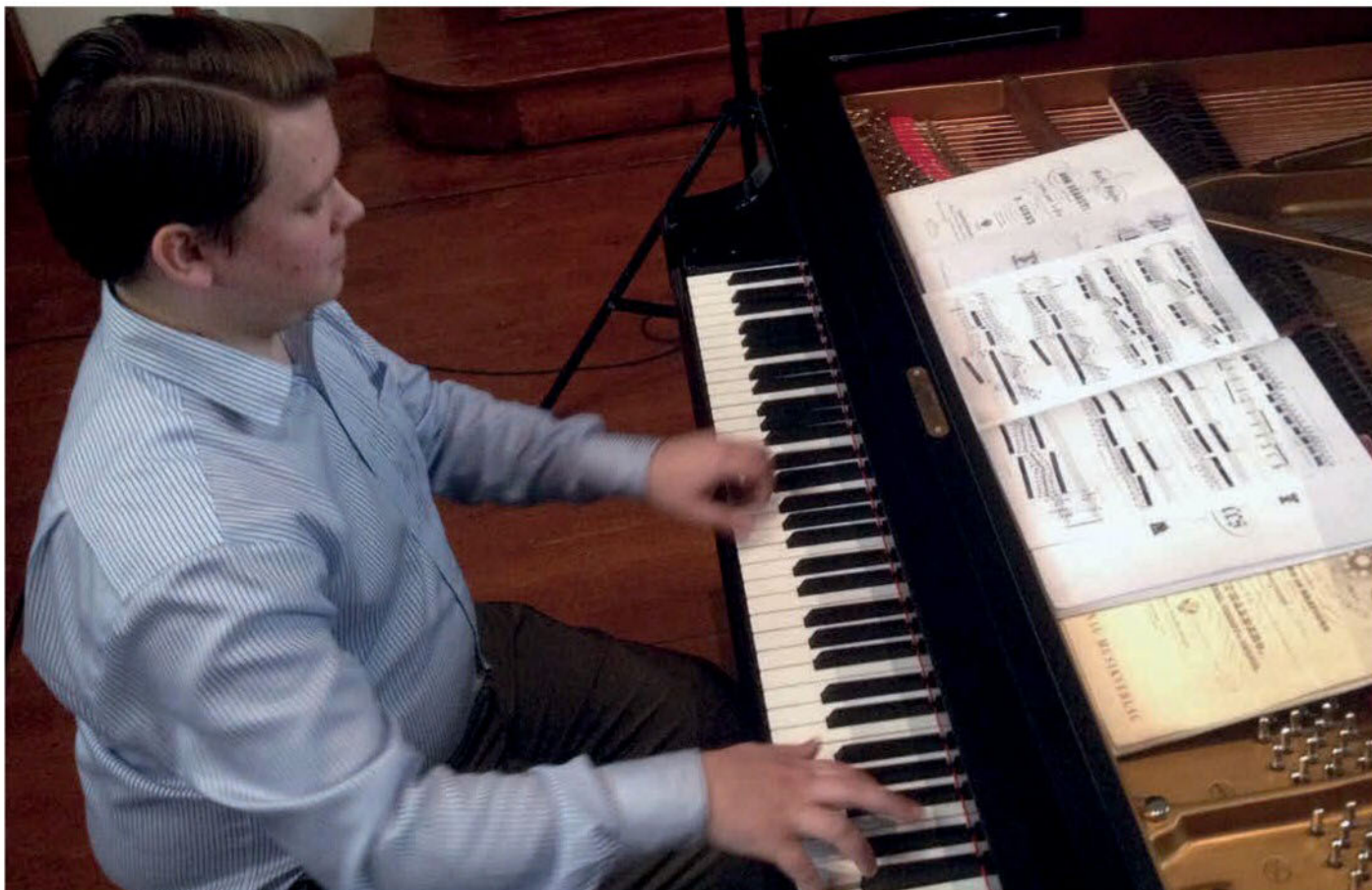
Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012

Thomas Demenga *vc*

ECM New Series © 2012 481 3195 (129' • DDD)



This is not a reissue of the Bach Cello Suite recordings that Thomas Demenga taped for ECM some 30 years ago and that were released on single discs coupled with



Mark Viner's contribution to Alkan's first box-set treatment is the finest account available of the major-key Studies, Op 35

various contemporary works. These sessions date from 2014 and, in key respects, mark a complete rethink. First, there's the switch to Baroque manners, which invariably means tuning down a whole tone and using gut strings ('unwound, not wrapped in aluminium'), most of the performances on 'a cello from the Testore school of 18th-century Milan' except for the last Suite, where Demenga uses his Guarneri.

For a sampling of how things have changed you need go no further than the Prelude to the First Suite where on this new recording, come the second half of the movement, Demenga speeds along the runway and takes flight, a manner of acceleration that he doesn't opt for on the earlier recording. Also, there's the matter of ornaments, another new feature that adds colour and interest to his playing. A good place to sample, or compare new with old, is the Gigue of the Sixth Suite, where ornaments clearly present on the new version are absent on the old. Also listen to the way he leans into the first note of the Fourth Suite's Prelude, quite different to the comparative formality of the earlier recording. This tendency to emphasise is even more apparent in the following Allemande, which over the years has gained in shape and tonal lustre.

The two versions of the Second Suite (where the pitch difference doesn't apply) are interesting in that first time around Demenga allows himself a subtle degree of vibrato – you hear it most noticeably in the Prelude – which has been ironed out on this later alternative. It's less a case of preferring one to the other than appreciating both, though viewed overall I find myself gravitating most gratefully to the relative interpretative freedom that Demenga allows himself on this newer recording, its 'speaking' quality, not always absolutely pristine, it's true, but never sounding studio-bound. It's a case of Demenga, Bach and you, the listener, a triumvirate that emerges unscathed for the duration.

Incidentally, if you have the earlier version of the Third Suite, which is recorded in a very resonant acoustic, this drier-sounding remake falls more happily on the ear. It's a really great set, though I've always liked Julius Berger's two recordings (Orfeo in 1984 and Wergo in 1995) which, like Demenga's, mark an evolving approach to interpretation (even more so in fact) while, beyond the huge roll-call of cellist past-masters, Steven Isserlis honours the golden mean as compellingly as anyone. **Rob Cowan**

Selected comparisons:

Berger (6/98) (WERG) WER4041-2

Isserlis (7/07) (HYPER) CDA67541/2

Berger (ORFE) C146 852H

JS Bach • Ysaÿe

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 1, BWV1002.

Solo Violin Sonata No 3, BWV1005

Ysaÿe Solo Violin Sonatas, Op 27 – No 4; No 6

Antje Weithaas *vi*

AVI-Music © AVI8553381 (72' • DDD)



It does seem extraordinary that no violinist before Antje Weithaas has

recorded a full double cycle of the solo violin sonatas of JS Bach and Eugène Ysaÿe. After all, Ysaÿe's indebtedness to Bach is well known and celebrated, meaning representatives from the respective collections are frequently programmed alongside each other. Still, as surprising as this is, it does mean that this three-volume project from Antje Weithaas (regular chamber collaborator with the likes of Christian and Tanja Tetzlaff, Martin Helmchen and Lars Vogt) pushes her solo career further



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Mightily impressive: Sueye Park's playing and her Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin are vividly portrayed in her account of Paganini's Caprices - see review on page 65

under the noses of British and US audiences than has often happened.

Here we have Vol 3 (the first was reviewed 3/15), and before wading into detail it's worth outlining the trilogy's distinguishing elements as a whole. Most notably Weithaas has taken all her ornamentations and bowings from Bach's score. Equally key to her sound, though, is that she's playing on a modern set-up: chin rest, metal strings and even a 2001 instrument from Stefan-Peter Greiner, the German luthier also behind Christian Tetzlaff's magnificent violin; and it must be said that if you ever needed proof that 18th-century Cremona is not a prerequisite for tonal riches, individuality and power, then Weithaas's Greiner does that job very nicely. In its lower reaches it's soft, cloaked and dark, with an ear-pricking modern edge; then, while duskiness also forms part of its top register's tonal armoury, so does a firm, powerful, singing platinum tone which Weithaas employs to great effect.

On to some detail, and as the dark, pulsing *Largo* of Bach's Sonata No 3 gets under way, it's the bowings that first hit the ears. More detached than we're often used to, they're still far from choppy under Weithaas's graceful delivery. Instead, their

'avoiding of ease and comfort' (as she puts it) simply brings a boost of extra vitality. Another triumph, when we later transition into Ysaÿe's Iberian-coloured Sonata No 6, is the clarity of the connection between Bach's earlier pastoral rhythms and Ysaÿe's 20th-century Habanera lilt.

I suspect Weithaas won't remain the only violinist to put these two cycles together. However, I also suspect that, regardless of who next takes the plunge, hers will yet stand tall alongside it. **Charlotte Gardner**

Brahms

Four Ballades, Op 10. Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel, Op 24

Nelly Akopian-Tamarina *pf*

Pentatone ④ PTC5186 677 (64' • DDD)



What constitutes interpretation? Surely every artist worthy of the name seeks to

internalise the message of the music she or he chooses to perform in hopes of sharing a unique perspective with the audience. In the best of cases, that perspective is highly individual, shaped by myriad factors,

including age, physique, training, culture, intelligence, imagination, curiosity and life experience, among countless others. Certainly the best music invites a variety of approaches. Indeed, one source of our continuing fascination with the Western canon is the constant revivification, the new insights and artistically satisfying experiences such varied, individual responses can produce.

Listening to Nelly Akopian-Tamarina's new release of Brahms is a reminder that the search for a uniquely personal interpretation can, on occasion, stray so far from the beaten path that, ultimately, it loses its way entirely. Akopian-Tamarina is a native of Moscow who studied with Goldenweiser and Bashkirov. She gives us a Brahms who, at best, had no personal experience of singing and dancing or, at worst, had been institutionalised and heavily medicated. Bluntly put, everything is excruciatingly slow.

Granted, at the beginning of the Variations, the little Handel aria casts a sort of quirky, somnolent spell. What might come of this, you wonder? To her credit, Akopian-Tamarina mostly maintains the line in her geologically calibrated tempos. But as the variations unfold, each more distended

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

DOUBLE DEBUSSY

Harriet Smith begins Debussy's anniversary year with two piano discs



Stephen Hough lavishes his fastidious pianism on Debussy

Debussy

Children's Corner. Estampes. Images.

L'isle joyeuse. *La plus que lente*

Stephen Hough *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68139 (69' • DDD)

Debussy

Children's Corner. Images. *L'isle joyeuse*.

Suite bergamasque

Seong-Jin Cho *pf*

DG © 479 8308GH (73' • DDD)



Hyperion has been keeping Roger Nichols particularly busy of late, writing the notes for Steven Osborne's Debussy recital (enthusiastically reviewed by Patrick Rucker – 10/17) and again for this recital from Stephen Hough. The overlap is quite considerable (both books of *Images*, *Children's Corner* and *L'isle joyeuse*) and it was a bold move to release the discs so close together. They make for fascinating comparison, as does a new disc from the 23-year-old South Korean pianist Seong-Jin Cho, who won the 2015 Chopin Competition. His programme is nearly identical to Hough's, presenting the *Suite bergamasque* instead of the *Estampes*.

Where to start? *Children's Corner* is always revealing. Stephen Hough's 'Doctor Gradus' is full of sensitive phrasing and

favours a relatively hazy sound world, compared to which Seong-Jin Cho has a degree more clarity and a striking sense of intimacy. How to pace 'Jimbo'? Cho is a little slow, which can turn his lullaby into a dirge; no risk of that with Hough, who is positively flighty. Nelson Freire (Decca, 4/09) seems especially attuned to this particular elephant, to charmingly naive effect. The eponymous doll in the following Serenade is a knowing creature in Hough's reading, while in 'The snow is dancing' he conjures a veiled landscape, whereas Cho opts for more clear-cut semiquavers at the outset. But turn to Osborne and be astounded by the way he finds as many shadings as there are Inuit words for snow. In the final number, the 'Golliwog's Cakewalk', Cho goes at it with a will, finding plenty of charm too, but Hough really does seem to misjudge things here – it sounds arch and curiously under-energised. Turn to the wondrously colourful Freire or the anarchically punchy Osborne for the full effect.

Suite bergamasque suits Cho's delicate pianism particularly well, and he brings charm to the 'Prélude' and a piquant exuberance to the 'Menuet', his upward-rushing scales suitably crystalline. He makes 'Clair de lune' individual without recourse to exaggeration and the final 'Passepiéd' wraps things up with a winsome delicacy.

Hough begins his disc with the *Estampes*, a vivid reminder that Debussy loved art as much as music, and Hough

similarly paints as well as plays. His 'Pagodes' sets the scene with just the right degree of blurring of the lines, motifs emerging and then receding once more, all combining to ethereal effect. In the closing 'Jardins' his pacing is spot-on and we get hints of the obsessive qualities that prefigure the *Études*, which give it a pleasing edginess. But I was less convinced by 'La soirée dans Grenade', which, though beautifully finished, sounds just too languorous, lacking a certain earthiness that Bavouzet conveys so effortlessly.

And so to the *Images*. Hough seems to me most successful in the slower numbers – the opening 'Reflets dans l'eau' is coloured with great subtlety and refinement. In the last of Book 1, 'Mouvement', Hough is pristine but a little slow for my taste, especially compared to Bavouzet, who finds tremendous clarity but also fullness at the climax around the minute mark. Cho here is a little on the hazy side though I much like his gradations of softness as he ascends to the top of the keyboard at the close of the piece. 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' is another interesting point of comparison: the interplay of the lines is limpid in Cho's hands, Hough opting for a more haloed effect – preference will be down to personal taste. But then sample Osborne and you find more risk-taking in the quietness, an unmistakable sense of colour that pierces the heart. In the following 'Et la lune', again it's Osborne who really gets to the heart of the matter, leaving the readings by Hough and Cho seeming slightly workaday.

I have reservations when it comes to 'Poissons d'or' too. Here Cho and Hough seem too slow: the inspiration may have been a Japanese lacquer plaque hanging on the composer's wall but these are sluggish, slightly dull golden fishes, where they should glisten. By comparison, Osborne brings them to life, glinting and wriggling; so does Bavouzet, to gleeful effect.

Finally to *L'isle joyeuse*. Again I find Hough a little bit steady – every phrase has clearly been considered but it doesn't propel you forwards as Cho does and both are relatively pale affairs compared to the exultant reading of Bavouzet, who brings to it a Lisztian brilliance filtered through a French lens. **G**

Children's Corner, Images, L'isle joyeuse –

selected comparison:

Osborne (10/17) (HYPE) CDA68161

Images – selected comparison:

Bavouzet (12/08) (CHAN) CHAN10497

Estampes, L'isle joyeuse – selected comparison:

Bavouzet (1/08) (CHAN) CHAN10443

and moribund than the last, one eventually loses hope. When the fugue finally arrives, if you haven't wandered from the room, things have become so bloated and inert that the entire edifice collapses of its own weight.

With such inauspicious conditions prevailing, the Op 10 Ballades don't even near the runway. **Patrick Rucker**

Komitas

Seven Songs. Msho Shoror. Seven Dances.

Pieces for Children. Toghik

Lusine Grigoryan *pf*

ECM New Series © 481 2556 (49' • DDD)



The eventful and ultimately tragic life of Komitas (aka Soghomon

Soghominian, 1869-1935) might well overshadow his legacy as collector of folk music from his native Armenia, though the recordings available testify to the dedication and sensitivity of these transcriptions. This latest disc focuses on his piano music, not least the *Seven Songs* (1911) that render the poetic sentiments of the original songs in limpidly affecting terms. The set of 12 miniatures which comprises *Pieces for Children* (1915) is even more distilled and refractory in its expressive essence, yet manages to conjure up a sense of time and place in the most evocative terms.

If these latter pieces feel akin to those of Bartók's *For Children*, the more substantial *Seven Dances* seem closer to the Hungarian's peasant-dance realisations in their more exploratory harmonies and frequent allusions to those indigenous instruments that likely played them. This creative process is taken further in *Msho Shoror* (1907), which Armenian region is represented by this 'dance scene' whose seven continuous numbers unfold as if a sequence of variations, their abstraction and astringency offsetting any tendency towards the merely descriptive. The fleeting *Toghik* ('Small Dance', 1915) offers an elegant rounding-off to the collection overall.

A highly appealing programme, then, which arguably benefits from its succinctness. Lusine Grigoryan renders it with an ideal poise and incisiveness, and she has been accorded spacious though never unfocused sound. Anyone who enjoyed the Komitas arrangements featured on an earlier ECM release (11/14) should certainly find the present disc comparably rewarding. **Richard Whitehouse**

Paganini

Solo Violin Caprices, Op 1

Sueye Park *vn*

BIS © BIS2282 (83' • DDD/DSD)



The first point worth making is that BIS's recording of the featured Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin (Cremona, 1739) is extremely lifelike: this is one of those rare cases where the quality of the instrument comes across as vividly as the quality of the playing which, for the most part, is first-rate. Quite how Sueye Park manages to effect such a perfect blend of multiple-stops, especially in Caprice No 4 (in thirds), is anyone's guess, but in doing so she counters the cliché of Paganini as devil with an alternative image of a seducer. The high parallel octaves at the start of No 15 are similarly persuasive, not to mention the D string drone in No 20.

In No 8, where she sustains a lower note while simultaneously playing a melody in a higher register (with more trills and double stops), again the effect is uncommonly smooth, while in No 18 the secure grip on the G string (in high positions) has an almost visceral effect. There's also plenty of gritty attack in the up-bow staccato of the Caprice No 10 and the start of No 17, while the lyrical slant of No 11's slower section is beautifully expressed. As to the wide stretches demanded for the reptilian No 12, Park makes these and other technical demands sound like mere child's play. Just as remarkable is No 6, where the haunting single-line melody has an eerie, ever-changing tremolo for company.

On the other hand, judged by the very highest standards, some Caprices sound just a mite effortful: No 7, for example, with its lightning staccatos and consecutive octaves, which are more playful in the hands of, say, Itzhak Perlman (EMI/Warner, 6/72) or Thomas Zehetmair (ECM, 12/09). The opening of No 13 might have sounded more off-the-cuff, though the savage attack on the G string in No 19 is mightily impressive.

A most enjoyable disc, highly competitive, with informed and readable notes by Julian Haylock and Park herself.

Rob Cowan

Prokofiev • D Scarlatti • Shostakovich

Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 2, Op 14 **D Scarlatti**

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk1; Kk27; Kk32; Kk141;

Kk466 **Shostakovich** Piano Concerto No 2,

Op 102². Ballet Suite No 2 – Elegy (arr Masleev)

Dmitry Masleev *pf* ²**Tatarstan National Symphony**

Orchestra / Alexander Sladkovsky

Melodiya © MELCD100 2517 (58' • DDD)



Winner of the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition, Dmitry Masleev delivers his

six chosen Scarlatti sonatas, all in the minor mode, with a nostalgic, pre-Historically Informed tinge that could work equally well in, say, Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*. Nothing sensational or sensationalist here, but the way he negotiates the twists, turns and subtle cornerings of the harmonic invention is totally disarming and without a trace of self-consciousness. Hear, too, the bustling energy when required, which never tips over into gaudy display, and the faultless repeated notes that never degenerate into mere machine-gun rattle. This is not merely competition-winning pianism but highly accomplished and communicative musicianship.

The Prokofiev sonata gives Masleev the chance to show off the more metallic extremes of articulation and colour, which he does with aplomb and without neglecting the balance between power and poetry. Perhaps I would have welcomed a more cushioned touch in the early stages of slow movement, but overall this is a nicely exploratory performance, always exquisitely graded in touch and pedalling.

The cheeky athleticism of the Prokofiev finale suggests a born Shostakovich player. And so it proves. Masleev has his own ideas of how to articulate and colour details in the Second Concerto, at the service of a convincing sense of drama and pacing. True, the slow movement may not be as magically suspended as in Alexander Melnikov's account for Harmonia Mundi. But the darting articulation of the finale is a constant delight. Nor are the Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra under Alexander Sladkovsky content to sit on the sidelines; their contributions are incisively etched and beautifully blended. Melodiya's ultra-close-up recording could be faulted but it undeniably shows Masleev's colouristic palette to maximum effect, both here and in the solo pieces.

By the time this review appears Londoners will have had the chance to hear Masleev in Liszt and Tchaikovsky.

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

MAGICAL MARYLA

Bryce Morrison welcomes a new set celebrating the neglected artistry of pianist Maryla Jonas



Crystalline poetry and virtuosity: Maryla Jonas brought vivid story-telling to Chopin

Who is Maryla Jonas, the subject of this four-CD set from Sony Classical? Born in Warsaw in 1911, her teachers included Paderewski, whose legendary charisma was surely dented when Jonas tells us how he wrote down prescriptive and seemingly unalterable instructions for the performance of Chopin's G minor Ballade only to change everything according to the mood of the moment. In her adopted America, where she fled from Nazi persecution, her playing attracted high praise from Arthur Rubinstein and won the sort of vivid and immediate response only given to the finest artists. The 'incredible speaking quality' of her Chopin, in particular, mesmerised her audiences and won the praise of Virgil Thomson, most waspish, if acute, of critics. Conversely and crudely, there were journalists who referred to 'a buxom blond artist with a towering hairdo' whose 'principal talent is for music that is small, tinkly and pretty'. And it is true that Jonas repeated endlessly the same programme with only minor alterations, avoiding the large-scale and leaving one in the dark regarding, for example, the Chopin Ballades and Scherzos as opposed to the Mazurkas, Waltzes and Nocturnes.

Yet Jonas can make such reservations seem carping and irrelevant. Never for

a moment does she allow you to sit back in simple acquiescence, but leaves you challenged and provoked into rethinking music you thought you knew intimately. Her strong and potent idiosyncrasy is far from self-conscious sophistication but comes from a burning if occasionally fraught commitment to her art. Only the summit of Mount Olympus satisfies her, a peak she achieves in performances of a high-born crystalline poetry and virtuosity. Such storytelling, such scene-painting is enough to turn you into the ever-fanciful Helen Schlegel of EM Forster's novel *Howards End*, who equated part of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with goblins walking across the universe.

Not surprisingly, three out of these four CDs are devoted to Chopin and it is in 22 out of his 58 Mazurkas – Chopin's confessional diary – that she leaves her most vivid trace. True, there are times when Jonas's intensity can seem what the French call *très nerveux*, reminding you of Delacroix's drawn and tortured portrait of Chopin. Again, she makes you imagine her surprise at pianists (Maurizio Pollini comes to mind) with a more objective, even diffident view of Chopin's volatility.

The Nocturnes, too, show Jonas acutely sensitive to alternating drama and serenity, to Chopin's far from

comfortable nature. She also achieves a special sense of occasion in the early C sharp minor Polonaise, where her realigning of the opening rhetorical gesture is at once typical of her originality rather than mere novelty. She changes the familiar manic sprint in the F minor Etude, Op 25 No 2, into a pattering semi-staccato delicacy and her delay of the E flat minor Étude's resolution underlines one of Chopin's ever-surprising codas. Her measured pace in the Berceuse is the opposite of, say, Alfred Cortot or Rubinstein's more rapid traversal, her focus and control a remarkable alternative to other more uncertain responses in this outwardly simple but ultra-demanding work.

Jonas's disc of miniatures is a nest of mostly jewels rather than trinkets. She is bright and sharp as a pin in Handel's G minor Passacaglia and her Mozart 'Turkish Rondo' has sufficient poise to make it reclaim its true musical quality. Schubert's G flat Impromptu is played, as was once traditional, in G major, and although more open-ended, less hushed and magical than from, for example, a Murray Perahia or Radu Lupu, it is never less than musicianly. Again, you could question Jonas's way with Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, where she takes a robust hand to 'Child falling asleep', that most poignant of lullabies, and where her concluding poet speaks more assertively than confidently.

Tragically, Maryla Jonas died of a rare blood disease in 1959 at the age of 41. Hers was a blazingly original talent, heard here in brilliantly remastered sound. An arch-perfectionist, she was the reverse of, say, Alfred Cortot's 'careless rapture' or Samson François's fun and fancy free. Naturally, I would love to have heard her in more substantial repertoire yet, arguably, she might well have quoted Goethe's dictum: 'It is when working within limits that genius declares itself.' Jed Distler's celebratory note ends by quoting Jonas's direct and simple approach: 'When I go to the piano to commence a concert, there is never a problem. Interpretation, technique, everything is solved, finished. If there were any question, I would not play. Never! Until I was sure ...' **G**

THE RECORDING



'The Maryla Jonas Story'

Maryla Jonas

Sony Classical © 4 88985 39178-2



For myself I'm eager to discover whether live encounters will live up to the considerable promise of this debut recording. **David Fanning**

Shostakovich – selected comparison:

Melnikov, Mabler CO, Currentzis

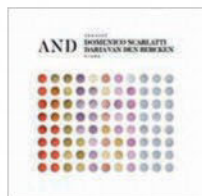
(5/12) (HARM) HMC90 2104

D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk3; Kk27; Kk32; Kk54; Kk87; Kk109; Kk119; Kk159; Kk212; Kk230; Kk247; Kk183; Kk481; Kk511; Kk519; Kk531; Kk544

Daria van den Bercken *pf*

Sony Classical ④ 88985 48665-2 (62' • DDD)



There's a sense of care about the whole production here, from the specially created

cover art to the choice of sonatas. Daria van den Bercken is alive to the gentler side of Scarlatti's creations as well as their brilliance, bringing warmth to the opening sonata, Kk183 in F minor. In Kk109 there's intimacy, too, the trills clear but not overly prominent, while Kk519 has a quiet sparkle to it. Kk212 is another highlight, with van den Bercken relishing the harmonic tensions and adding fastidious ornamentation.

One of the enduring fascinations of Scarlatti is the way a single sonata can respond to a wide variety of approaches. Van den Bercken takes Kk119 at a relatively sedate pace – others, not least Sudbin in his recent Scarlatti disc (BIS, 4/16), are more outlandish. Kk27, on the other hand, is relatively swift here, but it has its own allure, the ritardandos and accelerandos sounding entirely natural. However, I did find Kk32 just too slow, leaving its beautiful melody sounding a little stilted. Sudbin is also steady but maintains more of a sense of line; he takes considerably more liberties than van den Bercken but he makes them work, thanks to his sense of conviction. She is also a little too smooth-edged in Kk230, which really comes to life in Scott Ross's classic recording on harpsichord (Erato, 6/88).

Occasionally I wanted a bit more oomph: the hunt-infused Kk159 is too genteel – more of a sedate outing on a seaside donkey than a canter through the fields. Queffelec (Apex, 3/95) is a real speed merchant here but it's thrilling, and Hewitt (Hyperion, 2/16), not quite so feckless, gets more of a sense of the chase in her reading. But the much-recorded Kk87 is another winner, its undulating lines warmly shaped and full of enticing detail, such as the slightly detached left-

hand counterpoint at 4'03". She ends as she began, in a mood of gentle good humour with Kk544. **Harriet Smith**

'Chaconne'

JS Bach/Busoni Chaconne Busoni Toccata:

Preludio-Fantasia-Ciaccona, K287 **Casella**

Variations on a Chaconne, Op 3 **Gubaidulina**

Chaconne **Handel** Chaconne, HWV435 **Handel/**

Liszt Sarabande and Chaconne from 'Almira',

S181 **Nielsen** Chaconne, Op 32

Sofya Gulyak *pf*

Champs Hill ④ CHRC117 (73' • DDD)



Sofya Gulyak builds her new Champs Hill release around a series of chaconnes, dating

from the early 18th century through the 1960s. The highlight of the disc may be Busoni's fierce *Toccata: Preludio-Fantasia-Ciaccona* from 1921, which Gulyak attacks with something like abandon. Carl Nielsen's Chaconne is a close second, its intriguing harmonies and figuration imbued with a sort of nervous freshness. The virtuoso performance given Sofia Gubaidulina's early Chaconne (1962) achieves a terrifying intensity though, like most of the pieces on the disc, it suffers from what seems to be overly close microphone placement.

Gulyak also makes a strong case for the rarely heard Sarabande and Chaconne from Handel's *Almira*, Liszt's gift to his British disciple Walter Bache. Drawing on plenty of variety in both dynamics and articulation, Gulyak foregrounds the inherent tension of Liszt's juxtaposition of the two dances. Her straightforward interpretation stands in vivid contrast with Alessio Bax's more subtle and sensitive reading (Warner, 11/04).

The first two items on the programme are in many ways the least successful. Famously, the gateway to Busoni's remarkable piano transcriptions of Bach was the organ works, and it is usually with that sound ideal in mind, if not with that of the original Solo Violin Partita, that pianists approach the D minor Chaconne. Favouring neither, Gulyak employs a rather aggressive, detached touch for the opening, later contrasting it with legato *pianissimos*. Her preoccupation with pianistic sonorities unfortunately leaves the music itself a bit marginalised. Listening to the Handel Chaconne, Grigory Sokolov's Couperin comes to mind, though Gulyak's Handel is less virtuoso. The overall impression is of a mannered digital tour de force at Handel's expense. **Patrick Rucker**

'A Lute by Sixtus Rauwolf'

'French and German Baroque Music'

Anonymous Suite in F sharp minor

(attrib Pergolesi) **Dufault** Suite **Kellner**

Campanella. Courante. Sarabanda. Aria. Giga.

Gavotte **Mouton** Prelude 'La promenade'.

Allemande 'Le dialogue des graces ...'. Canaries

'Le Mouton'. Courante 'La Changeante'.

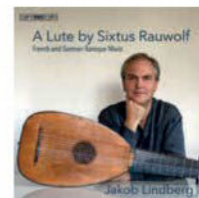
Gaillarde 'La Bizarre'. Sarabande 'La Malassis'.

Menuet 'La Ganbade' **Reusner** Padoana **Weiss**

Suite in A

Jakob Lindberg *lute*

BIS ④ BIS2265 (82' • DDD/DSD)



After delighting us with the music of Jacobean and Italian Renaissance masters

of the lute in his previous two recordings, London-based Swedish lutenist Jakob Lindberg turns his attention to works by French and German Baroque composers with equally felicitous results.

Lindberg's Sixtus Rauwolf lute was built in Augsburg around 1590 as a seven- or eight-course instrument. In 1715 it was altered and became the 11-course instrument it is today. As Tim Crawford writes in his superb booklet note, Lindberg has chosen works 'that could plausibly have formed part of the repertory of an owner of the instrument at around the time of its final conversion'. Crawford also explores the similarities between instrument restoration and early music performance, and the relationships between the German composers Esaias Reusner, David Kellner, 'Mr Pachelbel' and Weiss, and the French composers of an earlier generation from which they drew inspiration, such as François Dufault and Charles Mouton. The Baroque dance suite, with its variations on the classic Allemande-Courante-Sarabande-Gigue pattern, dominates. There are, however, clear differences between the French and German styles; furthermore, within those, the distinctive voice of each composer is evident.

These are voices Lindberg hears clearly and translates with great sympathy and imagination. He is stately and expressive in Reusner's *Padoana* while seizing upon the extravagant trills and strums evoked by the Dufault and the elegant deportment of the Mouton. Lindberg similarly relishes the toccata-like textures, bittersweet harmonies and melodic attractiveness of Kellner, 'Mr Pachelbel' and Weiss, though it is in the latter's Sarabande and Ciaccona that Lindberg's mastery of this repertoire is at its most convincing – and moving.

William Yeoman

Matthias Pintscher

Richard Whitehouse explores the German composer's unexpected influences and his unique approach to tradition and innovation

Whatever Schoenberg may have intended, the recent history of German music has been one of successive generations rejecting their immediate past only to find a new accommodation with it at a later stage. From which perspective, Matthias Pintscher presents something of a departure in that his music had already entered into a dialogue with his predecessors at the outset of his maturity. Three decades on, and his composing can be gauged in terms of an evolution consistent in its overall trajectory though unexpected in terms of the influences encountered.

Pintscher came to international prominence with the premiere in 1998 of his opera *Thomas Chatterton* (1994–98) – a wide-ranging take on its ill-fated protagonist that, coming four years after the music theatre of *Gesprungene Glocken* (1993–94), suggested a sole intent of making the dramatic genre his focus. Instead, there followed only *L'espace dernier* (2003), its experimental quality at a remove from its predecessor's more mainstream theatre, yet one that more fully represents Pintscher's ongoing concerns. This last work's

These works are indicative of that emotional diversity to be found within the stylistic consistency of Pintscher's output

subject matter is significant, as the poetry and life of Arthur Rimbaud have become a preoccupation – notably in the *Monumento* series, whose components extend across the 1990s. Central to these is the poem *Départ*, whose 'disturbing' (to cite the composer) presence informs such diverse pieces as *Choc* (1996), with its aggressive orchestral antiphonies, and *Sur 'Départ'* (1999), with its ethereal evocation. Others (notably Britten and Henze) have set Rimbaud, but Pintscher's subsuming of this poetry's essence in purely musical terms is both further-reaching and more provocative.

On a smaller scale, though no less acute in its fusion between image and musical response, the five *Figura* pieces (1997–2000) variously combine accordion, cello and string quartet in their engagement with the sculptor Alberto Giacometti. Even more emotionally charged is Pintscher's approach to the life and music of Carlo Gesualdo in *Ritratto di Gesualdo* (1992), his fourth quartet and most recent work designated as such, though string quartet is the chosen medium for *Study IV for Treatise on the Veil* (2009) – an ongoing series that utilises several formations in what is emerging as a quixotic and sometimes wryly humorous exploration of just what the 'classical' chamber domain can yield in the present. *Uriel* (2011–12) does the same



Matthias Pintscher is influential on three fronts: composer, conductor, teacher

for cello and piano in finding an uncanny aural equivalent for the eponymous painting of Barnett Newman.

Mention might also be made of pieces drawing upon EE Cummings – the scena *A Twilight's Song* (1997) and song-cycle *Lieder und Schneebilder* (2000) – in music amply conveying the elusive essence of this poetry. Such writing contrasts pointedly with the overtly expressionist approach to Stéphane Mallarmé in *Hérodiade-Fragmente* (1999) and the warmly expressive treatment of biblical writing in *Songs from Solomon's Garden* (2009), themselves indicative of that emotional diversity to be found within the stylistic consistency of Pintscher's output.

Yet it is orchestral music (with and without solo instruments) that has come to dominate his composing this century. That Pintscher had an innate command of larger forces was evident from his earliest pieces, and it came into full prominence with *Fünf Orchesterstücke* (1997). This much was duly acknowledged at its Salzburg premiere, as was an uncertainty over how – or, indeed, whether – the work alluded to Schoenberg's work of that name from nine decades earlier. Pintscher uses such temporal distance to reference the earlier set as though examining it from the wrong end of a telescope, so that aspects of the Schoenberg emerge from the texture almost despite themselves; any more concrete connection only emerges in the final piece, its valedictory nature all but confirming an inherent 'nostalgia for the future'.

A comparable milestone was provided by *Reflections on Narcissus* (2004–05), less a concerto than a symphony for cello and orchestra whose five separate while motivically interrelated movements evince *real* formal cohesion. This, allied to the discreet presence of Dutilleux (a figure whose



PINTSCHER FACTS

1971 Born in Marl, North Rhine-Westphalia, on January 29
1988 Begins music studies at Hochschule für Musik Detmold with Giselher Klebe
1991-92 Attends Hans Werner Henze's summer school in Montepulciano, Italy
1992-95 Studies composition with Manfred Trojahn and conducting with Peter Eötvös
1998 Premiere of opera *Thomas Chatterton* in Dresden on May 25
2000-02 Daniel R Lewis Young Composer Fellowship with the Cleveland Orchestra
2004 Premiere of theatre piece *L'espace dernier* in Paris on February 23
2006 Premiere of *Reflections on Narcissus* by cellist Truls Mørk in Paris on February 14
2008 Premiere of *Osiris* conducted by Pierre Boulez in Chicago on February 21
2013 Becomes music director of Ensemble Intercontemporain, Paris
2014 Premiere of *Idyll* by Franz Welser-Möst in Cleveland on October 9
2017 Premiere of *Shirim* with baritone Bo Skovhus in Hamburg on April 6

influence was, by the turn of this century, out of all proportion to his modest legacy), suggested Pintscher might be more directly embracing the European 'tradition'.

Such thinking was promptly undercut by the immediacy of *Transir* (2005-06), with its tensile interplay of flute and orchestra, then all but obliterated by the pyrotechnics of *Osiris* (2007) – its first performances conducted by Boulez, to whom this frequently explosive piece pays direct if hardly passive homage. Even more combative in its overall conception, *Sonic Eclipse* (2009-10) is a triptych where the subtly differentiated sound worlds of two 'Celestial Objects' – resourcefully conceived around trumpet and horn – find unexpected integration in 'Occultation', with its harmonic angularity and rhythmic abrasiveness worthy of Varèse.

Pintscher's output might easily have tailed off as he entered his fifth decade, partly through his commitments as teacher (in 2014 he joined the teaching faculty of the Juilliard School) but also through those as conductor. As with his exact contemporary Thomas Adès (whose aesthetic stance differs markedly), Pintscher had been active in this role (whether of his own or of others' music) from his student years. In 2013, he became the fifth music director of the Paris-based Ensemble Intercontemporain – a position first occupied by Peter Eötvös, with whom Pintscher studied two decades before and whose combining of these roles into a seamless creative whole has become a paradigm numerous successors have sought to emulate. Last year Pintscher also became principal conductor of Lucerne Festival Academy.

Such commitments might be expected to have influenced Pintscher's activity as a composer. In fact, a process of clarification (if not simplification) was already under way; thus, the stark expressiveness of *Mar'eh* for violin and orchestra (2010-11; revised 2015) and the textural stratification of *Bereshit* (2011-12). The latter's Hebrew title (translated as 'In the Beginning') is suggestive less of new beginnings than of a reapplying of first principles to a piece whose symmetrical poise and virtuoso handling of its sizeable ensemble results in a 'chamber symphony' rich in expressive nuance. From here it is a tangible step to the larger canvas of *Idyll* (2014), commissioned by orchestras in the US, Germany and Australia, and (for all its discursive understatement) the nearest that the mature composer has come to a symphony in the inevitability of its unfolding.

The past year has seen two major premieres: in March, cellist Alisa Weilerstein and the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave that of *Un despertar* (2016), its closely knit single span offering a thoughtful take on the three-movement concerto archetype; the following month, baritone Bo Skovhus with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra of Hamburg gave that of *Shirim* (2017) – Pintscher returning to the Song of Songs for a 30-minute setting in which the 'arioso' vocal line provides continuity against an orchestral tapestry that is arguably its composer's most sensuous and variegated to date.

Whatever else, these latter works typify Pintscher's guiding aesthetic throughout his maturity – that of pivoting (albeit never cautiously) on the cusp between tradition and innovation such that his music builds continually on earlier achievements with no need to reject what had gone before. This may seem a compromise to those who view the past as something to be embraced wholly or rejected outright, but the stylistic and qualitative consistency of what Pintscher has written ought to consolidate his stature in the context of European music for decades to come. **G**

PERSPECTIVES ON PINTSCHER

A range of works spanning his output to date

**Hérodiade-Fragmente. Sur 'Depart'.**

Music from Thomas Chatterton

Claudio Barainsky *sop* Dietrich Henschel *bar*

NDR Women's Chorus and SO / Christoph Eschenbach

Apex (A/01)

Pintscher's earlier music is well represented on this disc featuring the vocal scenas *Hérodiade-Fragmente* and *Music from Thomas Chatterton*, along with the choral work *Sur 'Depart'* – performed with manifest conviction by Eschenbach and his Hamburg forces.

**En sourdine. Tenebrae. Reflections on Narcissus**

Frank Peter Zimmermann *vn* Christophe Desjardins *va* Truls

Mørk *vc* Ens Intercontemporain, NDR SO / Matthias Pintscher

Kairos (5/08)

Concertante works from the early 2000s featuring the significant *Reflections on Narcissus*. Assured playing by all, including Zimmermann and Mørk, who premiered their pieces.

**Bereshit. Uriel. Songs from Solomon's Garden**

Evan Hughes *bar* Éric-Maria Couturier *vc* Dimitri Vassilakis *pf*

Ensemble Intercontemporain / Matthias Pintscher

Alpha 218 (2/17)

The most recent disc dedicated to his music includes large-scale ensemble work *Bereshit*, along with chamber and vocal pieces. Committed solo performances, with playing that confirms Pintscher's ability as a conductor.

Vocal



Lindsay Kemp explores a disc of rare Baroque sacred music:

'Who before has encountered the fast-living (and dying) Stradella's ardently austere setting of the Lamentations' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



Tim Ashley enjoys Mary Bevan's ravishing musical voyage:

'Bevan's purity of tone and discreet yet telling way with words can be by turns unnerving and alluring' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**

JS Bach

St Matthew Passion, BWV244

Benedikt Kristjánsson *ten* Evangelist **Kresimir Strazanac** *bass* Christus **Gerlinde Sämman, Isabel Jantschek** *sops* **Benno Schachtner** *counter* *ten* **Paul Schweinester** *ten* **Peter Harvey** *bass* **Gächinger Cantorey / Hans-Christoph Rademann**

Stage director **Friederike Rademann**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus ② **DVD** ACC20408 (173' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Forum am Schlosspark, Ludwigsburg, Germany, March 2017



There are strong arguments for opening out the themes of the Passion by means not of a staging transplanted from church

to opera house, as has been attempted in recent years, but through movement. In this choreographed Passion there are two discrete but overlapping layers of action. The musicians concentrate on their given roles (with a very few, telling exceptions), thus obviating the kind of coordination problems which beset Katie Mitchell's production at Glyndebourne, while dancers are freed to respond as much to Bach's music as to the narrative at its source.

Those arguments are justified here by Team Rademann: Hans-Christian, conductor of many fine choral recordings on Carus and Harmonia Mundi, and his wife Friederike, the choreographer whose idea it was to gather 100 children from schools in the Stuttgart area and teach them to dance.

Bach's elaborated setting of St Matthew is peculiarly suited to such an approach. The distance (and the monumental sense of space) between the two pairs of ensembles, written into their parts, is respected here by placing them at opposite corners of the stage; Rademann leads Orchestra/Choir 1, the Evangelist and Christus from front left. Thus the dancers occupy both the physical and imaginative space between them, at the heart of the music. In his booklet note the

conductor approves and embraces René Jacobs's notion of Orchestra/Choir 2 as an echo of the first ensemble. The filming conveys this, as cameras track between dancers and musicians, but the audio mix sandwiches them back together.

Powerful musical values underpin the enterprise. Somewhat ironically given that the stage is filled with young people, the chorale melody in the opening chorus is sung by adults from the excellent Gächinger Cantorey, but their contribution is fitted to this vigorously pointed account, dynamically disposed in such a way that contrasts arise not from fussy nuancing within parts but the adding or subtracting of them in a way familiar from historically sensitive performances of keyboard music from the era, whether organ or harpsichord, and anchored by an unmannered, broad-grained continuo ensemble. The vocal soloists are all excellent, fairly extrovert whether in a mode of declamation or confession; Benno Schachtner's alto and Benedikt Kristjánsson's Evangelist are most vividly drawn and sung.

Friederike Rademann herself appears in complement to Schachtner at the structural apex of the Passion, though her elegantly phrased convulsions mirror the violin obbligato of 'Erbarme dich'. Such naturalistic responses to the shape of the music convince me less than the powerful sense of community in her charges. The gestures are unpretentious – gathering in an open circle for a Quaker communion, and in a tight bunch for the congress of chief priests – but always tied to the text: the chorales are especially effective in this regard, to the point of Friederike grasping her bruised heel as the Penitent sinner reflects upon his guilt inherited from Adam. Ancient, pan-cultural gestures of keening and mourning are deployed in tune with Picander's frequent recourse to the imagery of weeping, not least in the Passion's great outer pillars; and tears would be an entirely understandable response from the other side of the screen. **Peter Quantrill**

Bernstein · Vaughan Williams

Bernstein Chichester Psalms **Vaughan Williams**

Dona nobis pacem (orch Jonathan Rathbone)

George Hill *treb* **Ailish Tynan** *sop* **Roderick Williams** *bar* **Richard Gowers, Henry Websdale** *org*
The Choir of King's College, Cambridge;
Britten Sinfonia / Stephen Cleobury
King's College, Cambridge ② **CD** KGS0021
(51' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Though scored by Vaughan Williams with the Huddersfield Choral

Society in mind, it transpires that *Dona nobis pacem* need lose none of its impact when sung by a smaller ensemble when the orchestration is reduced too, as it is here in a new version by Jonathan Rathbone, one that will surely attract new amateur performances by choral societies without a metropolitan reach.

In that matter of impact, King's Chapel plays its part, not only in the acoustic halo that surrounds Ailish Tynan's opening plea, but the space surrounding and somehow uplifting strings and voices: bass drum and organ entirely fill the air when they need to, but there is a not inappropriate illusion of the performance taking place in mid-air.

That's also due to Stephen Cleobury's incisive direction. Smaller forces bring with them here accents like bullets in 'Beat! beat! drums' and shrapnel-shards of consonants: no mean feat in that building. The apotheosis of 'Reconciliation', treble line floated over the main choir and answered by a reprise of Tynan's imprecation, is most hauntingly achieved. The plainer tread of the long 'Dirge', originally conceived at a time (around 1905) when Vaughan Williams and Holst were best of friends, works well at a more than usually flowing tempo and the reduced orchestration brings the organ forwards to lend greater dignity to its climax.

Roderick Williams puts his own choral-scholar experience to good use with a



Hans-Christian Rademann and his choreographer wife Friederike with a dancing St Matthew Passion

confiding delivery of John Bright's words in 'The Angel of Death'; like Brian Rayner Cook in Bryden Thomson's recording (my own favourite of the original version on record – Chandos, 3/89), he is noble, unfussy and not too theatrical.

The sense of the choir and Cleobury making an album slightly out of character with their recorded legacy continues with a *Chichester Psalms* which is punchy and present – the Hebrew sounding far more guttural and 'other' in the King's acoustic – in a way that their previous recording for EMI was not. Though placed farther from the microphones than his earlier counterpart, George Hill makes a stronger, more stoutly confident impression in Psalm 23, beautifully accompanied on harp by Helen Sharp. **Peter Quantrill**

Dvořák

Requiem, Op 89 B165

Ilse Eerens *sop* **Bernarda Fink** *contr*

Maximilian Schmitt *ten* **Nathan Berg** *bass*

Collegium Vocale Gent; Antwerp Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Herreweghe

Video director **Leonid Adamopoulos**

EuroArts (DVD) 206 0578; (Blu-ray) 206 0574

(97' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at deSingel, Antwerp, 2014



With forces a fraction of those envisaged by the composer and not a single Czech or English native among the soloists,

Philippe Herreweghe leads a devoted if not authentically proportioned account of the Requiem Dvořák finally agreed to write for the Birmingham Festival in 1891, having turned down their request six years earlier for a *Dream of Gerontius*. Only the lack of string weight proves telling in the 'Confutatis' and other big moments, which in the work's first half come few and far between.

The soloists are well matched to Herreweghe's intimately scaled reverence, with Ilse Eerens floating a lovely, fresh tone in the 'Graduale', to which the winds and female chorus respond in kind. When Dvořák's inspiration rises in the Requiem's second half, so does the heat of Herreweghe's direction: he proves himself sensible to the impact of Wagner on the *Sanctus-Benedictus*, where *Die Meistersinger*, *Parsifal* and (especially) the first act of *Die Walküre* make their presence felt in enjoyably swift and unembarrassed

succession. By the same token, he takes care over the G minor-G major cadences of the 'Pie Jesu', which Dvořák gracefully appropriated from the opening phrase of his previous large-scale work, the Eighth Symphony.

Were I then seeking a distinct, modern alternative to the monumental but impassioned conviction of Mariss Jansons's Concertgebouw performance (RCO Live, 7/10), this would be a contender – but only, I think, in the audio version welcomed warmly by Malcolm Riley (PHI, 6/15). Issued on film, the presentation is a bit of a disgrace. There is no booklet note. The credits list eight camera operators but the angles available in the deSingel hall seem frustratingly limited, and mostly to side-on close-ups, though naturally not for Herreweghe himself. This was not a hastily arranged re-enactment of a 1980s Karajan/Telemondial production but it sure looks like one. **Peter Quantrill**

Dyson

Choral Symphony^a. St Paul's Voyage to Melita^b

^a**Elizabeth Watts** *sop* ^a**Caitlin Hulcup** *mez* ^{ab}**Joshua**

Ellicott *ten* ^a**Roderick Williams** *bar* **The Bach Choir;**

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / David Hill

Naxos (CD) 8 573770 (75' • DDD • T)



A game of two halves in which the first might be more noteworthy but the second is far

better. Paul Spicer discovered Dyson's 1917 graduation piece *Psalm CVII* symphony and overture (aka *Choral Symphony*) at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The psalm tells of the expulsion of the Jews from Israel but the nature of the verses is more ceremonial than narrative and so is Dyson's long-breathed treatment. The composer clearly wanted to establish a sense of exiled longing but the piece can feel ponderous as a result; the climax to the slow movement takes a long time coming and, when it does, sounds rather too much like that from *I was glad* by Dyson's teacher, Parry.

I'll concede that the work reveals something of the goal-oriented breadth some will know from Dyson's *Magnificat* in D. Elizabeth Watts will certainly know that piece given her background, and she brings a sense of love and fluidity to her solo contributions. But the *Choral Symphony*'s relative dullness and impressionability sets it in direct contrast to Dyson's purely narrative *St Paul's Voyage to Melita*. The composer obviously had his ears open in the intervening 20 years and the piece almost justifies Spicer's bold claim in the booklet note that 'as an orchestrator [Dyson] was second to none'.

Gone is the parochial rum-ti-tum (despite the subject of a sea voyage), banished is the over-influential spectre of Parry and the sense that Dyson is struggling to keep his textures virile. Even in the opening pages there are textural devices and harmonic glances that colour the tale, while the proverbial sea spray of the storm sequence is thrilling. Dyson's solution to the appearance of the angel that miraculously saves St Paul's crew – maintaining momentum via a single drumbeat – is a masterstroke. Joshua Ellicott sings with a true sense of drama and the chorus sound interested and enlivened. Diction is excellent even if the tone from the male singers can be dull. The orchestral playing maintains a degree of edge, too, but the strings reveal that this may have been a rather rapid rehearse-record. Perhaps not a masterpiece, but the *Voyage* is worth a listen. **Andrew Mellor**

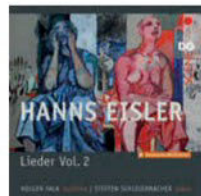
Eisler

'Lieder, Vol 2'

Anmut sparet nicht noch Mühe. Ardens sed virens. L'automne prussien. Bleib gesund mir, Krakau. Chanson allemande. Deutschland. Es

sind die alten Weisen. Fausts Verzweiflung. Das ferne Lied. Die freie Wirtschaft. Genesung. Goethe-Fragment. Die Götter. Der Graben. Die haltbare Graugans. Heimatlied. Ideal und Wirklichkeit. Im Blumengarten. Im Frühling. Die Krücken. Legende von der Entstehung des Buches Taoteking. Linker Marsch. Motto: Auf einen chinesischen Theewurzellöwen. Mutterns Hände. Nationalhymne der DDR. Ostern ist Bal sur Seine. Die Pappel vom Karlsplatz. Der Pflaumenbaum. Der Priem. Printemps allemande. Rückkehr zur Natur. Und endlich. Und es sind finstere Zeiten. Und ich werde nicht mehr sehen. Verfehlte Liebe. Von der Freundlichkeit der Welt. Was ich dort gelebt. Wie der Wind weht. Wienerlied

Holger Falk bar **Steffen Schleiermacher** pf
Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG613 2040-2
(74' • DDD • T)



The second volume of MDG's survey of Hanns Eisler's songs covers the period

from after his return from American exile until his death in 1962. There are still echoes of those righteously angry, determined marches laced with bittersweet nostalgia and self-pity familiar from the outstanding first volume (8/17), but increasingly here we have a composer stepping away from his earlier political conviction. He had an uneasy relationship with the East German authorities after his return to Berlin, and it shows.

He tries out a broader stylistic range to fit a wider spectrum of poets, and there's a greater sense of intimacy. Brecht, who dominated part one, is still present, but here we also have Goethe and Heine, Karl Kraus and Peter Altenberg. There are some of Eisler's *Neue deutsche Volkslieder*, a much-debated project that set poems by the GDR grandee Johannes R Becher. We also have a selection of his 40 settings of poems by Kurt Tucholsky, including the delightful waltz of 'Rückkehr zur Natur', to which Holger Falk brings the same unsentimental intelligence and clear, beguiling tone that made the first volume such a success.

There's an exquisite Goethe fragment, a touching Heine setting ('Verfehlte Liebe') as well as the remarkable 50-second-long 'Fausts Verzweiflung' (to a text by Giacomo Leopardi). If you need any persuading of either the quality of the music or that of the performances, try the disc's final triptych: the delicate, wistful 'Und Endlich' (Altenberg), a witty 'Wienerlied' and the languidly doleful, gently heartbreaking 'Bleib gesund mir, Krakau', likely Eisler's last song.

MDG's presentation again misses a few tricks, with no translation of the German texts and little detail in the track-listings, but those are minor gripes. I enjoyed the first volume of the series enormously, and this disc proves a more than worthy successor. **Hugo Shirley**

Handel

Ah che pur troppo e vero, HWV77 – Col partir la bella Clori^a. La bianca rosa, HWV160c^a. Cantata spagnuola, HWV140^a. Chaconne, HWV435. Hornpipe, HWV461. Keyboard Suite, HWV442 – Chaconne. Sei pur bella pur vezzosa, HWV160b – Nascermi sento al core^a. Sonata, HWV364b. Tra le fiamme, HWV170^a

^a**Dorothee Miels** sop **Hille Perl** va da gamba

La Folia Baroque Orchestra /

Lee Santata chitarra spagnuola/lute

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 40532-2
(73' • DDD • T/t)

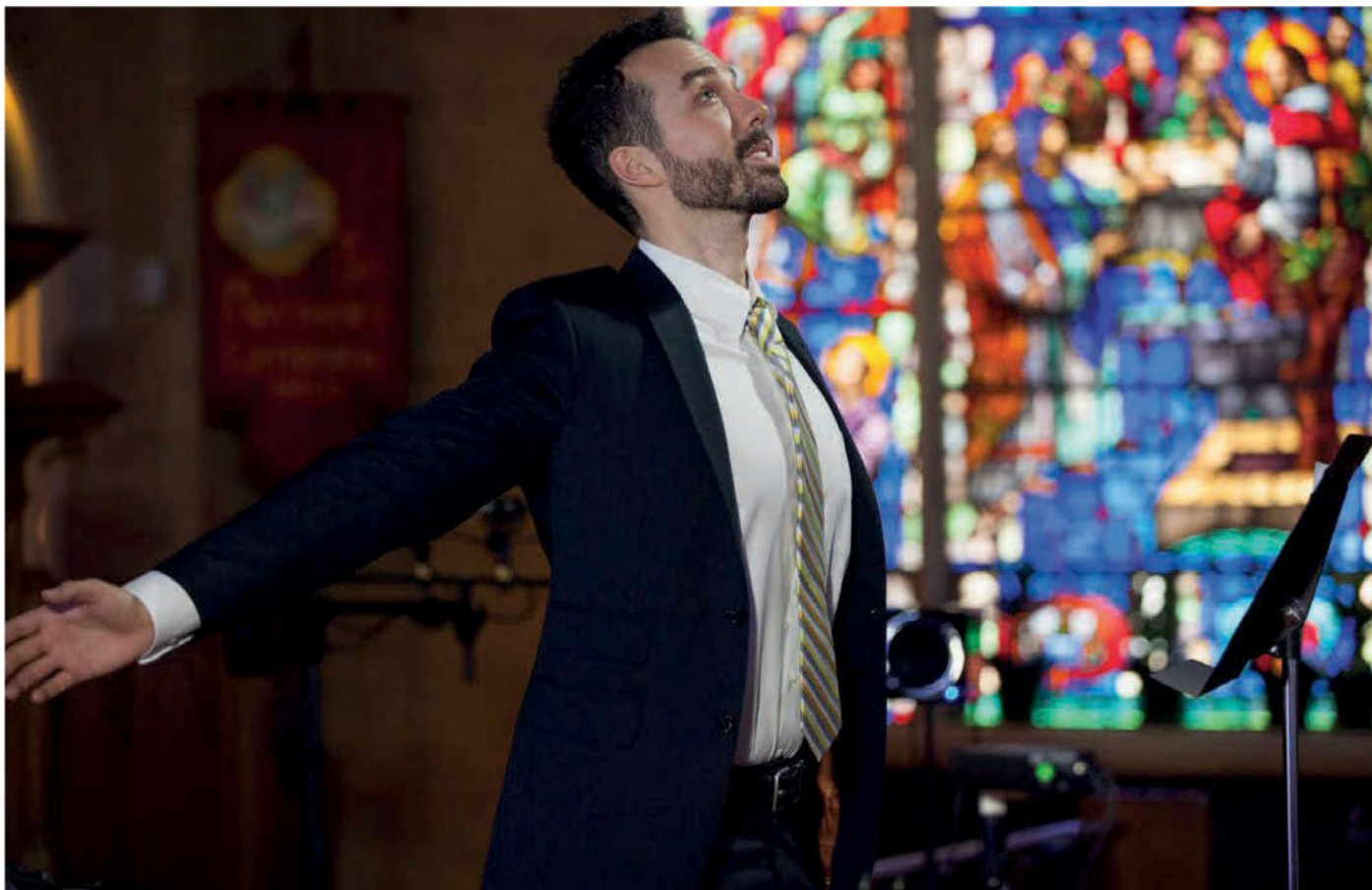


Handel for viola da gamba? Well yes, there is some, mainly from his early years in

Italy, including obbligato parts in the oratorio *La Resurrezione* and the cantata *Tra le fiamme*. Then from the London years there are contributions to *Giulio Cesare* and an actual sonata, though in reality this is a violin piece which Handel wafted in the gamba's direction by scribbling out the first few notes an octave lower at the bottom of the manuscript and adding the words 'per la viola da gamba'; apparently it doesn't lie too well under gambists' fingers, but I guess it's the thought that counts.

We get *Tra le fiamme* and the sonata here, along with a transcription of another cantata aria, its guitar accompaniment making it sound almost like some meandering pop ballad (recompense, perhaps, for Handel's tendency to ignore the gamba's lyrical side), but the disc is not just about Hille Perl's viol, as the soprano Dorothee Miels occupies centre stage in two further cantatas, including the delicious *Cantata spagnuola*.

As ever when Perl is involved, warmth and affection abound, befitting not just the cantatas' delicately amorous subjects but also the balmy air which Handel's Italian-period music breathes so easily. But there is also spontaneity here, a tangible sense that the musicians are enjoying each other's company and the slightly unusual combinations they find themselves in. Nowhere is that clearer than in the transcriptions (with added violin and imaginative harpsichord) of two sprawling



Consistently compelling: Jared Schwartz transposes Liszt songs for his bass voice – see review on page 75

keyboard chaconnes, in which they cut loose and egg each other on so freely that they may as well be improvising it themselves. Miels stands a little apart from this, perhaps, but her voice – clear, accurate and controlled rather in the Emma Kirkby manner – is a real pleasure to listen to; what a pity that it is somewhat submerged by the relatively large ensemble of *Tra le fiamme!* An unusual release, then, but full of infectious musicality.

Lindsay Kemp

Henze

Lieder von einer Insel. Fünf Madrigale.

Orpheus Behind the Wire

SWR Vocal Ensemble; Ensemble Modern / Marcus Creed

SWR Classic © SWR19049CD (63' • DDD • T/t)



Choral music forms a not insignificant aspect of Henze's output, these three cycles

offering a viable (if inevitably partial) overview of the composer's evolution across nearly four decades.

Earliest here is the Five Madrigals (1947) – settings of the Renaissance poet

François Villon (albeit in the interventionist translation by Paul Zech), whose overtly nonconformist attitude doubtless struck a chord within the young Henze. The string quintet and brass sextet weave their capricious course through the choral texture, with the music's underlying neoclassicism enlivened by bitonal elements which suggest lessons well learned from Wolfgang Fortner. At the time of his 'choral fantasy' *Lieder von einer Insel* (1964), Henze had been resident for several years on Ischia and these five settings of his regular collaborator Ingeborg Bachmann mingle rapture and regret to haunting effect; not the least attraction being the luminous choral textures, thrown into relief by discreet commentary from an ensemble of seven instruments.

The ballet *Orpheus* marked the extent of Henze's political phase, to which the *a cappella* cycle *Orpheus Behind the Wire* (1984) forms an eloquent pendant. Here the recourse to non-singing techniques and often dense textures confirms the wider expressive range, at once meditative and anguished, in what is assuredly among the highlights of its composer's later years. There have been other recordings, not least a fine one by the Berlin Radio Chorus on a disc that also features the *Orpheus*-related

cantata *Aristaeus*, but the logical coupling of this disc is its own justification – making another self-recommending release from the SWR Vocal Ensemble.

Richard Whitehouse

Orpheus Behind the Wire – selected comparison:

Berlin Rad Chor, Gritton (11/06) (WERG) WER6680-2

Hugill

Winter Journey^a. Four Songs to Texts by AE Housman^a. When summer's end is nighing^a. Quickening^b. Four Songs to Texts by Ivor Gurney^a

^bAnna Huntley *mez* ^aJohnny Herford *bar*

^bRosalind Ventris *va* William Vann *pf*

Navona © NV6121 (64' • DDD)



Robert Hugill's name may be familiar as the author of the classical music blog Planet

Hugill, but he is also a composer. Recordings have appeared previously from Divine Art and Nimbus, there are some items available on YouTube and now Navona has taken up his cause. His output focuses on vocal and church music and the 18 songs on the present disc take us to the heart of his secular production.

MARK PADMORE KRISTIAN BEZUIDENHOUT

FRANZ SCHUBERT WINTERREISE ON POEMS BY WILHELM MÜLLER

An inner odyssey

Winterreise is at once the peak of the lieder repertory and Schubert's testament. It guides the listener to distant landscapes, into the innermost depths of the human heart. For the singer, it is a mighty challenge – taken up here by Mark Padmore in a new interpretation, accompanied this time on the fortepiano by Kristian Bezuidenhout. This intense, distilled reading of Wilhelm Müller's poetry resolutely turns its back on the traditions that usually hold sway in this area of the Romantic musical heritage.



The song-cycle *Quickening* is the earliest work here, though its dates of composition are unclear: 'dating from the 1990s' says the slip-case, '2001' – the date of the premiere – says the insert. (Neither Navona's online notes nor the composer's website resolve the discrepancy.) Given here in its original scoring for mezzo-soprano (or alto), viola and piano – an alternative exists with soprano and violin – these six songs on texts by Christina Rossetti are nicely sung by a slightly tremulous-sounding Anna Huntley, though it is Rosalind Ventris's viola, weaving its way around and between the voice and William Vann's piano, that is most beguiling.

The remainder of the programme is for baritone Johnny Herford and piano only. The strongest item is the four delicate, sensitive settings of Ivor Gurney (2007), drawing performances of like quality. I was less taken with the Housman songs (2008, 2016) and *Winter Journey* (2009, texts by Rowan Williams), rather middle-of-the-road art songs in which Hugill is content to stay put expressively. The result is a not unattractive, slightly anonymous lyricism that left me yearning for the brilliance of Britten, Maconchy or Lefanu. With reasonable sound, this is a pleasant, unchallenging way to spend an hour.

Guy Rickards

Janáček · Kodály · Poulenc

'Kyrie'

Janáček Otčenáš^a Kodály Missa brevis^b

Poulenc Mass

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge /

Andrew Nethsingha with ^aAnne Denholm *hp*

^aGlen Dempsey, ^bJoseph Wicks *org*

Signum © SIGCD489 (63' • DDD • T/t)



The Mass settings of Kodály and Poulenc were composed within six years of

each other (1937–42), and with mixed choirs in mind. They have nevertheless entered the repertoire of the English college and cathedral tradition, giving rise to several recordings, though not hitherto coupled together. In fact Kodály casts the tenor melody of his *Agnus Dei* in a modally drawn arch of marked Poulencian architecture, and each work springs from an inner well of necessity. The conclusion of Poulenc's own *Agnus* brings the first appearance in his output of a leitmotif ('the symbol of the Christian soul', he called it, 'confidently looking forward to life in Heaven', quoted from Richard Bratby's fine booklet essay) that found its

apotheosis in the music for Sister Blanche in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.

To both movements the treble voices of St John's bring an ineffably poised gravity that is not within the expressive ambit of the Robert Shaw Chorale (praised to the skies by Poulenc as ideal interpreters) or Kodály's own school of choral training. When Poulenc first heard Shaw's RCA recording of his Mass in 1949, he apparently rushed from the bathroom, covered in shaving foam, and exclaimed, 'At last, the world will know I am a serious composer!' Yet a signal virtue of this new recording is the moulded caress of every luscious harmony in what are predominantly homophonic works. The final cadence of Poulenc's 'Osanna' is like a rum baba glistening in a patissier's window; you could almost bite into it. The glittering Cymbelstern stop on the last chord of Kodály's *Gloria* and the sensuous rise and fall of the *Benedictus* count as further instances of a recording made to be enjoyed.

A rumble on D emanates from the organ of St John's: serendipitously in the case of the D minor/major Kodály, less so for Janáček's setting of the 'Our Father', which begins on E. Rather more than his colleagues at Gonville & Caius (ASV) and King's (EMI, 2/89), Andrew Nethsingha coaxes from his charges a bold, ripe, forwardly placed sound that is as consonant with the Czech text as it may be foreign to the singers' instincts and education. The overlapping cries of 'Give us this day' are as thrilling as they are brief: quintessential Janáček from an unlikely source.

Peter Quantrill

Liszt

'Songs for Bass Voice and Piano'

Du bist wie eine Blume (fifth version), S287 No 2. Go not, happy day, S335. J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie, S327. Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher (third version), S373. Le Juif errant, S300. O lieb, solang du lieben kannst!, S289 No 1. Pace non trovo (later version), S270b No 2. Sei still, S330. Des Tages laute Stimmen schweigen, S337. Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh (third version), S306. Weimars Toten, S303. Weimars Volkslied, S313

Jared Schwartz *bass* Mary Dibbern *pf*

Toccata Classics © TOCCO441 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Liszt's songs were all originally written for high or middle voices, and there has been a tendency of late, as interest in his vocal output gathers pace, to focus on performances in original keys. Jared Schwartz and his accompanist Mary

Dibbern, however, have prepared – and recently published – an edition of his songs transposed for bass, which in turn forms the basis of this fine recital. Bookended by a pair of lofty *pièces d'occasion* celebrating Weimar and its literary past, their programme surveys Liszt's entire career, juxtaposing big, early, bravura songs with briefer, more meditative works from his middle and late periods.

Schwartz's tone sometimes acquires a pulse in his middle registers but the intensity and emotional range of his singing are consistently compelling. 'Pace non trovo' ranges through excitement and conflicted bewilderment before reaching rapt stasis at its close, while 'O lieb, so lang du lieben kannst!', its words given due prominence for once, is strikingly sombre. He's at his best in the late, unsparing reflections on mortality such as 'J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie', where the words are carefully shaded without tipping into overt declamation and the bitter, introspective mood is admirably sustained.

The grander, extrovert numbers are comparably impressive, though there's an unfortunate verbal slip – 'Seige' for 'Siege' ('victory') – in 'Weimars Volkslied', receiving its first recording here. 'Le Juif errant' isn't Liszt's best song and goes on too long. Schwartz attacks it, however, with angst-ridden bravado, finishing with an extraordinarily resonant low C, while Dibbern, exemplary throughout, presses its unyielding ostinatos restlessly forward. Contrary to the booklet notes, Schwartz is not the first male singer to attempt 'Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher', which Benjamin Brecher recorded for his 'Forgotten Liszt' album (MSR, 3/17). I'm not entirely convinced that it works sung by a bass, either, though Schwartz's extraordinary way with the ending – a diminuendo fading to silence, *mezza voce*, at the top of his range – certainly justifies its inclusion. Tim Ashley

R Panufnik · Tavener · Barley

'99 Words'

Barley Improvisation on Tavener Themes

R Panufnik 99 Words to my Darling Children.

Heav'nly Harmony. The Tablet of your Heart

Tavener Look in thy glass. Maha Maya. Svyati.

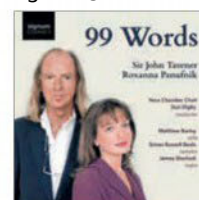
Threnos

Matthew Barley *vc* James Sherlock *org*

Simon Russell Beale *narr* Voce Chamber Choir /

Suzi Digby

Signum © SIGCD519 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Five world premieres and a beautifully constructed programme make this

disc from Suzi Digby and London chamber choir Voce rather fresher and more special than its dated cover art suggests. The pairing of composers is a natural and by no means new one. Taking inspiration from Catholicism and the Christian Orthodox tradition respectively, Roxana Panufnik and John Tavener each represent different facets of contemporary British sacred music, and their contrasting styles – one dramatic, programmatic, the other meditative and transcendent – generates an interesting dialogue.

There are two factors, however, that set this disc apart. The first is the superlative cellist Matthew Barley, who not only serves as soloist throughout but also contributes a new improvisation on Tavener themes. Rhetorical without sentimentality, musical without being self-conscious, his contributions give much of this repertoire (notably Tavener's *Threnos* and his *Svyati*, in which the Protecting Veil becomes a musical shroud) a life beyond Isserlis, and his thoughtful, highly textured improvisation dissolves and reassembles the composer's signature sounds in a provocative musical intervention and commentary.

Then there's the title track: *99 Words to my Darling Children* is the musical keystone to the programme, a work that pairs Tavener's own text with Panufnik's music – a homage that borrows Tavener's instrumentation and even elements of his style while also remaining true to Panufnik's own idiom. The result – a lullaby that cradles its sung text with infinite tenderness – is exquisite, and beautifully handled by Voce's amateur singers.

Of the remaining premieres, it's Tavener's *Maba Maya*, with its dynamic opposition between choir and organ (nimble played by James Sherlock, with some blazing, brilliant registrations) that is most striking, and together with Panufnik's muscular, episodic Dryden setting *Heavenly Harmony* seems most likely to make its way into regular choral repertoire. If occasionally outpaced by the very different technical demands of both composers, Voce's singers give this repertoire a strong, and very welcome, first outing.

Alexandra Coghlan

Rachmaninov · Tchaikovsky

Rachmaninov Sing not to me, beautiful maiden, Op 4 No 4. The Dream, Op 8 No 5. Twelve Songs, Op 14 – No 1, I wait for thee; No 5, These summer nights; No 11, Spring Waters. Twelve Songs, Op 21 – No 5, Lilacs; No 7, How fair this spot. Before my window, Op 26 No 10. The Muse, Op 34 No 1. Six Songs, Op 38 – No 3, Daisies; No 5, A Dream

Tchaikovsky Six Songs, Op 16 – No 1, Cradle Song; No 2, Wait. He loved me so much, Op 28 No 4. Seven Songs, Op 47 – No 1, If only I had known; No 6, Does the day reign? Death, Op 57 No 5. Frenzied Nights, Op 60 No 6. Serenade, 'O child beneath thy window', Op 63 No 6. Six Songs, Op 73 – No 2, Night; No 6, Again, as before, alone. To forget so soon

Lyubov Petrova sop **Vladimir Feltsman** pf
Nimbus Alliance © NI6350 (69' • DDD • T/t)



With a half-Tchaikovsky, half-Rachmaninov

programme, a Russian singer with an Anglo-friendly voice plus an even better pianist, this set is a good place to start for those who have been long interested in exploring the song output by these well-known composers but are intimidated by complete anthologies or single discs that lack English notes and translations.

Lyubov Petrova has a cleanly produced voice with a wonderful legato, fine instincts for expressive phrase shaping and ample tone for shading the music that never grows unwieldy in some of Tchaikovsky's more modest creations. It's a young voice and a young sensibility. Her 'Cradle Song' hasn't the underlying melancholy of Ljuba Kazarnovkaya (Naxos, 1999) or the dramatic narrative of Christianne Stotjin (Onyx, 3/09). But Petrova's elegant vocalisation gives a good sense of any given song's overall shape, even with a bit of conversational lingering in songs such as 'Wait'. Occasionally she goes a bit far into the operatic zone and over-sings the microphone, which seems inappropriate with music that has one foot in the parlour and expresses fairly basic emotions. Vladimir Feltsman is a good counterbalance: he favours such a dampened piano tone you'd swear he was playing a period instrument.

Rachmaninov's songs are more in the realm of concert music, if only because the writing often requires a pianist of Feltsman's calibre – 'These summer nights' and 'Spring Waters', for example. The composer's own playing is clearly a model in Feltsman's straight but never unyielding tempos, in contrast to the more Chopin-esque approach of Vladimir Ashkenazy on the complete Rachmaninov song set with Elisabeth Söderström (Decca). In vocal comparisons, Söderström wins out for her richness of detail with a linguistic authority that perhaps Petrova, a native Russian speaker, takes for granted. Yet Petrova's soft singing is a marvel. And the more sophisticated Rachmaninov's poems –

'The Muse', for one – the more deeply committed she is. When she sings of 'magic stillness' in 'A Dream', you hear it in her voice. **David Patrick Stearns**

Rachmaninov

Vespers (All-Night Vigil), Op 37

Catherine Wyn-Rogers mez **Adam Tunncliffe** ten
Vasari Singers / **Jeremy Backhouse**

Vasari Media © VIMACD003 (58' • DDD • T/t)



The Vasari Singers join an ever-expanding field with this new recording of

a work that was once considered very exotic by most Western choirs. Competition is consequently intense but the Vasari acquit themselves very well indeed in this recording made to celebrate the 60th birthday of the conductor, Jeremy Backhouse.

They begin with the opening blessing, which is always much better than starting out of the blue with 'Priidite poklonimsya', and this is followed by a fine rendition of 'Blagoslovi, dushe moyá' with Catherine Wyn-Rogers on outstanding form. Jeremy Backhouse is not afraid of relatively slow speeds – this section lasts a full five minutes – and this can pay dividends; but there is the corresponding challenge of maintaining the tension of the musical line, and this is not always entirely successfully achieved in the following 'Blazhen muzh'. No such problems affect 'Svete tikhi' or 'Nyne otpuschaeshi', with its famous low bass B flats, however, and both benefit from the excellent solo contributions of Adam Tunncliffe.

Other highlights include the 'Shestopsalmie', with its extraordinary contrasts of light and dark, the fiery 'Khvalite imya Gospodne' and 'Voskresenie Khristovo videvshe', and a very well-shaped Great Doxology, which builds up superbly. Pronunciation is very good, though Englishness does slip through from time to time. A bonus is the superb booklet, with full transliterations and translations, and thorough notes by David Bray. **Ivan Moody**

Schubert

Winterreise, D911

Bo Skovhus bar **Stefan Vladar** pf

Capriccio © C5291 (67' • DDD • T/t)



Not usually a paragon of moderation or elegance, Bo Skovhus has continued his

traversal of Schubert Lieder with a *Winterreise* recording that's not for connoisseurs with a deep sense of the piece's recorded history but something that challenges what you thought was best for this oft-recorded (maybe over-recorded) song-cycle. In the first few seconds, 'Gute Nacht' isn't a wounded trudge into into the winter netherworlds. Here, the song-cycle's protagonist is briskly fleeing society, perhaps as much a hunted criminal as a rejected lover. At the other tempo extreme is 'Wasserflut', which feels like a deep and sudden realisation of loneliness at its most existential.

In between, the pianist Stefan Vladar – a big presence here – keeps each song moving at a firm pulse, almost as a clear frame that contains Skovhus's vivid range of emotion. Songs such as 'Auf dem Flusse' can wind down into repetitive self-pity, but not with these two. 'Frühlingstraum' in particular shows Skovhus singing with the palest of exhalations one moment and a Bayreuth bark in another. One sign of a credible *Winterreise* is how hallucinatory moments are handled: the protagonist's incredulity at seeing himself as a white-haired old man in 'Der greise Kopf' is beautifully done, while the final song, 'Der Leiermann', is a well-sustained decrescendo with sensitive articulation of the text until the emotional gasp of the final lines.

On the opera stage, Skovhus is sometimes guilty of doing certain things for pure effect. Here, he has studied the text with a depth that doesn't permit falling into mannerism. Only his tendency to cut off phrases a nanosecond before their logical conclusion tells you he may not be born to sing this repertoire.

What separates this pair's brand of originality from the 1979 Peter Schreier/Sviatoslav Richter set – my *Winterreise* of choice – is multiplicity of meaning. Skovhus explores an emotion to its depths, while Schreier starts at such depths and then goes to any number of other places as the song progresses. There are moments in 'Einsamkeit' when Vladar enters the Richter zone of deep comprehension. Even when not quite there, he has startling insights with buried details arising in ways that almost feel confrontational.

David Patrick Stearns

Selected comparison:

Schreier, Richter (2/86*) (PHIL) 478 1714

'Agitata'

Brevi O spiritus angelici **Caldara** Passione di Gesù Cristo Signor Nostro – Sinfonia **Gregori** Concerto grosso, Op 2 No 2 **Jommelli** La Betulia liberata – Prigionier che fa ritorno **Porpora** In procella sine stella **Stradella** Et egressus est

Torelli Lumi dolenti lumi **Vivaldi** Juditha triumphans – Agitata infido flatu

Delphine Galou *contr*

Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone *hpd*

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA371 (63' • DDD • T/T)



This is a treasure trove of rare music, much of which must surely be receiving

first recordings. Baroque opera has increasingly become an accepted part of the scene in recent years, with forgotten big-name composers such as Caldara, Jommelli and Porpora emerging into the light both in complete works and in individual singers' recital discs, yet much of the sacred music of these same composers and others still languishes in obscurity. This release, a first recital disc for the French contralto Delphine Galou following some accomplished contributions to Vivaldi operas, addresses the issue by focusing entirely on sacred repertoire, with results both fascinating and revealing.

Who, for instance, has ever heard a vocal piece by Torelli? Here we have his *Lumi dolente lumi*, a Passion Friday cantata that interleaves two powerful recitatives with a pair of expertly shaped and contrasted arias. Who before has encountered the fast-living (and dying) Stradella's ardently austere setting of lines from the Lamentations (here with Galou chillingly heading each section by barely breathing its Hebrew index letter)? And who knows Giovanni Battista Brevi, whose motet *O spiritus angelici* enjoys the free-ranging declamatory vigour of the late 17th century? As contrast to that we also have a sizzling aria from Vivaldi's oratorio *Juditha triumphans*, plus two glorious examples of mid-18th-century vocal polish in a complacent aria from Jommelli's oratorio *La Betulia liberata* and a wonderful display of virtuoso and assured writing for voice in Porpora's motet *In procella sine stella*.

Galou is a perfect singer to introduce us to this music, thanks to an agile and comfortable technique (hear the way she sails effortlessly through her full compass in a single phrase in the first aria of the Porpora), and a voice that sounds like a firm countertenor in the higher register and a contralto in warm strength of the lower reaches. The playing of the Accademia Bizantina – who add a concerto grosso by Gregori and a sinfonia by Caldara to the mix – is keen as mustard and filled with typically telling detail by director Ottavio Dantone. A lovely disc of discoveries. **Lindsay Kemp**

'The Gate of Glory'

'Music from the Eton Choirbook, Vol 5'

Browne O regina mundi clara **Fayrfax**

Magnificat 'Regali' **Hacomplaynt** Salve

regina **Kellyk** Gaude flore virginali

Lambe Gaude flore virginali

The Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford /

Stephen Darlington

Avie Ⓢ AV2376 (79' • DDD • T/T)



Well over six hours long, this series now surpasses The Sixteen's as the

largest discographic survey ever devoted to the Eton Choirbook. The fifth volume has its share of gems: Hugh Kellyk's seven-voice *Gaude flore virginali*, also included in the earlier series, is just as impressive here. The approach is more relaxed; and although the piece's form is more easily grasped with Harry Christophers's slightly crisper tempos, its dramatic touches are perhaps better staged here. For the upper parts of Browne's *O regina mundi clara* Stephen Darlington opts for high tenors instead of the countertenors preferred in The Tallis Scholars' recording. Occasionally the contrapuntal details aren't quite as clear but the overall sound is more involving in the fully scored passages, and in the reduced sections the interplay of voices is beautifully handled.

I'll keep saying so, but Browne really is peerless: next to him, Fayrfax's well-known *Magnificat 'Regale'* is opulent but unsubtle. In fairness, Darlington's tempos may contribute to that impression (I've commented on them before); they're more decidedly a problem in Lambe's setting of *Gaude flore*, in which the tempo chosen for the dupe-time section robs the setting's mensural intricacies of their effect and saps the singers' certainty of purpose. Robert Hacomplaynt's *Salve regina* sounds more confident, but whereas the quality of the music of Eton's lesser-known figures has been a highlight of the set, I'm not so convinced by this (the reduced sections in particular lack direction). The closing invocations are effective and very nicely managed but it would be a pity for a series of such distinction to close on a comparatively tentative note. **Fabrice Fitch**

Kellyk – selected comparison:

Sixteen, Christophers (2/94) (CORO) COR16018*

Browne – selected comparison:

Tallis Scholars, Phillips (6/05) (GIME) CDGIM026

'Dolce duello'**G**

Albinoni Il nascimento dell'Aurora – Aure, andate e bacciate **Boccherini** Cello Concerto No 10, G483 **Caldara** Gianguir, imperatore del mogol – Tanto, e con sì gran piena. Nitocri – Fortuna e speranza **D Gabrielli** San Sigismondo, re di Borgogna – Aure voi, de' miei sospiri **Handel** Arianna in Creta – Son qual stanco pellegrino. Ode for St Cecilia's Day, HWV76 – What passion cannot music raise and quell **Porpora** Gli orti esperidi – Giusto amor, tu che m'accendi **Vivaldi** Tito Manlio – Di verde ulivo **Cecilia Bartoli** *mez* **Sol Gabetta** *vc* **Cappella Gabetta / Andrés Gabetta** Decca © 483 2473DH (77' • DDD • T/t)



A symphony in pink and blue, the candy-coloured hardback

book is enough to give you toothache. The irrepressible Cecilia Bartoli and cellist Sol Gabetta pose in a series of gowns (Vivienne Westwood gets a credit), their hair adorned with flowers or giant bows, obviously having such a laugh that you're already smiling before the disc has even hit the CD player. Entitled 'Dolce duello', the album's theme is Baroque arias which feature prominent roles for cello obbligato, Bartoli and Gabetta sparring in a selection of musical duels across a century of composition.

Make no mistake, these are duels of the gentlest kind, kittenish tussles with claws retracted. Some of the arias are slow numbers, voice and cello entwining in a loving embrace. Arias by Caldara, Vivaldi, Handel and Porpora are particularly lovely. Bartoli is technically astonishing, rattling off coloratura with drill-like precision but wide-eyed joy and bags of personality. Gabetta's cello is softer-grained (and occasionally a little backwardly placed), her playing nimble and responsive to Bartoli's ornaments in a playful game of cat and mouse.

Vivaldi's *Tito Manlio* has received a few recordings and Vitellia's 'Di verde ulivo' is one of the few arias on the disc where it's possible to listen to a comparative version (three of the tracks are premiere recordings). On Ottavio Dantone's complete recording (Naïve's Vivaldi Edition, 4/06), Marijana Mijanović and the cellist of Accademia Bizantina make heavy weather of it, whereas Bartoli and Gabetta skip along brightly, with extended solo ornaments. 'Aure, andate e bacciate' from Albinoni's serenata *Il nascimento dell'aurora* is one of the livelier numbers, an *aria di bravura* evoking the rustle of the breeze.

Cappella Gabetta, led by Andrés Gabetta (Sol's brother), offer tender support, with especially charming theorbo and violin contributions to the aria from Domenico Gabrielli's oratorio *San Sigismondo, re di Borgogna*. The aria from Caldara's *Gianguir* also has the Gabetta siblings tussling together along with Bartoli. Boccherini's Cello Concerto No 10 in D major, with Gabetta taking the solo spotlight in a spirited performance, feels like a bit of an afterthought, tacked on to the end of the programme, where it might have made a welcome instrumental interlude in the middle of the disc.

As ever with Bartoli's projects, the booklet is full of interest, from Alexandra Coghlan's entertaining history of musical duels to Giovanni Andrea Sechi's detailed programme notes. Highly calorific Baroque fun. **Mark Pullinger**

'No Time in Eternity'

Anonymous In Paradise **Bennet** Eliza, her name gives honour **Byrd** Ye sacred Muses, race of Jove **Farrant** O Jove, from stately throne **Nyman** Come and Go. Come unto these yellow sands. Full fathom five. No time in eternity. Self-Laudatory Hymn of Inanna. Where the bee sucks. While you here do snoring lie **Patrick** Prepare to die. Send forth thy sighs **Picforth** In nomine **Tye** In nomine, 'Crye'. Sit Fast **Ensemble Céladon / Paulin Bündgen** *counterten* Aeon © AECD1757 (57' • DDD • T)



Michael Nyman's soundtrack to *Prospero's Books* – director Peter Greenaway's 1991

postmodern homage to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* – remains one of his most powerful scores. So powerful, in fact, that Greenaway just didn't know what to do with it. Ever resourceful, Nyman found other uses, including a vibrant, colourful saxophone concerto (subtitled *Where the Bee Dances*) and the five Ariel songs, performed here in a new arrangement by the brilliant countertenor Paulin Bündgen and equally impressive viol consort Ensemble Céladon.

That Nyman's setting of Shakespeare's words should find its most natural home in the sound world of the early 17th century seems almost too obvious to mention. The result is a striking synthesis of old and new, as heard in 'Full fathom five'. Here, deep, resonant viols provide an ideal backdrop for Bündgen's floating lines. Elsewhere, in 'Where the bee sucks' (Nyman's starting point for the aforementioned saxophone concerto), a busy treble line scurries above and around a calming melody in the voice.

In between, as if to draw the ancient and modern into sharper relief, works by several English Renaissance composers are included, ranging from Nathaniel Patrick to William Byrd. The edges become particularly blurred in Christopher Tye's remarkable *Sit Fast* – edgy dissonances giving way later to almost minimalist-style repetitive cycles. The focus remains on Nyman, however. The *Self-Laudatory Hymn of Inanna*, originally performed by James Bowman and Fretwork, is given a more relaxed treatment. But the recent *No Time in Eternity* – settings of short poems by Robert Herrick composed specifically for Bündgen and Ensemble Céladon, remains the highlight. Charming, enchanting, soul-melting lullabies, to paraphrase the 17th-century lyric poet.

Pwyll ap Siôn

'A Pleasing Melancholy'

Danyel Eyes look no more. If I could shut the gate against my thoughts **Dowland** Flow my tears. Lachrimae. If floods of tears. M George Whitehead his Almand. Mourn, mourn, day is with darkness fled. Paduan. Sorrow, come (arr Wigthorpe). Volta **Holborne** My heavy sprite (arr Aziz) **Hume** What greater grief **R Jones** Lie down poor heart

Emma Kirkby *sop* **James Akers** *lute*

Chelys Consort of Viols

BIS © BIS2283 (72' • DDD/DSD • T)



John Dowland's songs have been a touchstone in the career of soprano

Emma Kirkby, revisited at every stage of her career and vocal development, each time with fresh perspective. The early recordings with Anthony Rooley and the Consort of Musicke for L'Oiseau-Lyre – dew-fresh and sweetly simple – gave way to the mature, deeply felt delivery of 'Time Stands Still' (Hyperion, 8/86) and 'Honey From the Hive' (BIS, 4/06). Now, at nearing 70, she returns once more to these works in a recording that pairs Dowland's songs with his *Lachrimae* – the seven extraordinary pavans for viol consort and lute, each a variation on Dowland's own 'Flow my tears' pavan.

'Semper Dowland, semper dolens', punned the composer, and melancholy is certainly pervasive in a collection that interweaves the tear-strewn pavans with songs of loss, grief and mourning. Only the instrumental dances – a snappy Volta, a matter-of-fact Almand, a graceful Paduan – offer the release of tension that



Duels of the gentlest kind: Cecilia Bartoli and Sol Gabetta create enormous fun in Baroque arias with a cello obbligato

is so essential if the mood is not to become laboured.

Anyone familiar with Fretwork's recording of the *Lacrimae* or even Phantasm's smoother offering will find the Chelys Consort of Viols in a very different sonic world. Their soft blend, coupled with the weight and depth of sound, is a luxury instrument, capable of embracing the emotional extremes of Dowland's music without strain. But in gaining this amplitude they lose that grit and husk in the sound that gives a viol consort its personality – a personality so ideally suited to music whose palette is drawn from infinite shades of grey.

If you're looking for the most beautiful recording of the *Lacrimae*, this is unquestionably it. Whether it's the best is very much a matter of taste. As to Kirkby, the glassy purity of her youth has now become a pleasingly smudged and pitted voice of experience, wayward at the top and occasionally snatched at the bottom. It's a texture that works effectively with these tormented texts, but makes an odd death-bedfellow for Chelys's plush musical upholstery. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Lacrimae – selected comparisons:

Fretwork (11/89⁸) (VIRG/ERAT) 545005-2

Phantasm (8/16) (LINN) CKD527

'Serenade'

Bizet *La chanson du fou. La Coccinelle.*

Pastorale Chabrier *Villanelle des petits canards*

Chausson *Cantique à l'épouse. Chevalier*

Malheur. Le temps des lilas Gounod *La chanson*

du pêcheur. Ô ma belle rebelle. Sérénade

Magnard *Les roses de l'amour Massenet* *Heure*

vécue. Les yeux clos Meyerbeer *Sicilienne*

Saint-Saëns *Danse macabre. Le pas d'armes du*

Roi Jean. Si nous n'avez rien à me dire

Thomas Hampson bar **Maciej Pikulski** pf

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 681 (58' • DDD • T/t)



Given that Thomas Hampson's discography includes several distinguished recordings of French opera, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that this is actually his first album of French songs. It is, as one might expect, a disc of great intelligence. 'Curated' (to use the word on his website) by Hampson himself with the literary scholar and music critic Sylvain Fort (he was also communications advisor to Emmanuel Macron during his presidential campaign), 'Serenade' forges a carefully calibrated emotional narrative from *mélodies* written for salon

performance by 19th-century composers associated primarily with opera.

The opening and closing songs – Gounod's 'Sérénade' and Magnard's 'Les roses de l'amour' – both depict a man gazing at his sleeping mistress: in Gounod's case, with an air of erotic anticipation; in Magnard's, in quiet affirmation of fulfilment. In between come songs about love, loss, youth and age, with the occasional foray into comedy (Chabrier's villanelle about ducks) or narrative ballad (Saint-Saëns's 'Le pas d'armes du Roi Jean'). At the mid-point, we find the dark irony of Chausson's 'Chevalier Malheur', in which the protagonist's 'old heart' is given one last chance of love. Songs placed in the second half, meanwhile, reflect back on those in the first. So Bizet's 'La Coccinelle', for example, surveying missed romantic opportunities with the amused detachment of hindsight, is later balanced by Massenet's 'Heure vécue', in which similar experiences lead to frustrated bitterness, and so on.

The performances are comparably fastidious, though it must also be said that Hampson's voice is no longer quite what it was. His tone now occasionally lacks lustre, and a pulse sometimes intrudes. Against that, however, must be set his ability to fuse text, lines and dynamics into

highly individual expressive statements. The slow ebb and flow of tone with which he characterises the unvarying grief of Gounod's 'La chanson du pêcheur' contrasts with the fluctuating light and shade he brings to Chaussou's 'Le temps des lilas', with its suggestion of passion eroded by time. Saint-Saëns's 'Le pas d'armes' sounds gruff, but the way Hampson conveys the wily old knight's uncomprehending wonder at Isabeau's love for her wounded page is profoundly touching. The leisurely tempo he adopts for 'Danse macabre' might surprise some, though it allows him, and us, to savour the song's satire: the pianist, Maciej Pikulski, also comes into his own here, with some appropriately brittle if dexterous playing. He's an excellent accompanist, subtle in his phrasing, keenly alert to shifts in mood and colour throughout. **Tim Ashley**

'Splendour'

Anonymous Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr
G Böhm Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott. Füh uns, Herr **Buxtehude** Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BuxWV211. Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren, BuxWV212. Praeambulum, BuxWV153. Wahr Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit, BuxWV282
Decius Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr **Decker** Christum wir sollen loben schon. Vater unser im Himmelreich **Goudimel** J'ayme mon Dieu **Hassler** Alleluja, laudem dicite Deo nostro. Amen **H Praetorius** Christe qui lux es et dies. O lux beata Trinitas **Jacob Praetorius** Christum wir sollen loben schon. Vater unser im Himmelreich **Johann Praetorius** (attrib) Ich lieb den Herren **M Praetorius** Christe der du bist Tag und Licht. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland **Scheidemann** Alleluja, laudem dicite Deo nostro. Fantasias - WV74; WV83. Praeambulum, WV33 **Stadlmayr** O lux beata Trinitas - Temane laudum carmine; Christum rogamuset Patrem, Amen **Tunder** Praeludium in G minor **Weckmann** Et misericordia
Kei Koito org II Canto di Orfeo / **Gianluca Capuano** Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 43767-2 (73' • DDD)

Played on the Hans Scherer organ (1624) of St Stephanskirche, Tangermünde, Germany



Once praised for its perfection by Michael Praetorius, the 1624 Hans

Scherer organ of St Stephan of Tangermünde is one of the only surviving 'Hamburg-Prospekt' organs from the early Baroque period in northern Germany still practically in original condition. The organ's restoration some 20 years ago gave it

back its original tone and mean-tone temperament, and it's now a rare instrument on which we can accurately recreate the sounds of the period in music by the Praetorius family, Buxtehude, Böhm and Weckmann.

This quietly delightful recording by organist Kei Koito and vocal ensemble Il Canto di Orfeo pairs works from this golden age of German organ music with chorales, hymns and chants. The result is neither quite liturgy nor concert but a sort of musical meditation in which we often trace a single chorale melody or hymn tune from its origins through embellished organ arrangements and variations.

The sequence, which at a glance seems rather one-note, actually gives a strong sense of the stylistic breadth of the period, featuring Venetian-style polychoral dances alongside wonderfully austere Lutheran works. Using some original registration suggestions, organist Kei Koito gives her listeners a tour of her characterful instrument. Soft-spoken reeds bring an otherworldly delicacy to the long, unbroken melody of Praetorius's *O lux beata Trinitas*, while Buxtehude's punchy *Nun lob, mein Seel* glitters brass-bright. Only the anonymous *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr* overcooks things with some brass stops that blurt horribly flat.

The vocal works, directed by Gianluca Capuano, are exemplary, the vibrato-less purity and soft blend of their solo voices mirroring with uncanny sympathy the tone of the organ itself. Plainchant lilts and curves with ease, and everything from that to various Lutheran hymns and a charming little chanson-like psalm-setting by Goudimel, *J'ayme mon Dieu*, is dextrously and unobtrusively shaped. Oh for some texts and translations, though, to give the full picture of works whose sacred words are all-important.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Two Little Words'

Brahe Two Little Words **Britten** La belle est au jardin d'amour. Quand j'étais chez mon père **Brahms** Da unten im Thale **Dring** Song of a Nightclub Proprietress **Falla** Nana. El paño moruno. Polo **Head** Foxgloves **Horovitz** Lady Macbeth **Jacobs-Bond** When you come to the end of a perfect day **A Murray** I'll walk beside you **M Palmer** Music when soft voices die. Das zerbrochene Ringlein **Pritchett** Siren Song **Schubert** Das Mädchen, D652. Rosamunde, D797 - Romanze **Sondheim** Losing my mind **Tchaikovsky** Why?, Op 6 No 5. None but the lonely heart, Op 6 No 6. Night, Op 73 No 2
Dame Felicity Palmer *mez*

^a**Gemma Rosefield** *vc* **Simon Lepper** *pf* Resonus © RES10199 (63' • DDD • T/t)



'It's hard not to reminisce at this stage of my life and career, now that I have been

singing, one way or another, for the best part of 50 years', Felicity Palmer writes in a booklet-note for 'Two Little Words', her first recital disc for some time. It was recorded at Snape Maltings two years ago, during an Aldeburgh Music residency she shared with her accompanist Simon Lepper, whose influence she acknowledges on her decision to return to Lieder after a long career on the operatic stage. It's a wonderfully intimate disc that communicates the tangible enjoyment that she and Lepper find in performing together. It also forms a personal, reflective summary of a life lived with, and through, music.

The programme consists of 'pieces that hold particular memories', as she puts it. She opens with Michael Head's 'Foxgloves', 'a very early art song I learnt as a student at the Guildhall School of Music'. She includes music by her father, Marshall Palmer – an arrangement of the German folk song 'Das zerbrochene Ringlein' and an exquisite setting of Shelley's 'Music when soft voices die', which deserves to be better known. Britten's French folk-song arrangements are an oblique reminder that it was her albums of French song, recorded for Argo in the 1970s, that, for many, marked her out as an artist to be reckoned with. The singing actress is very much present, too, both in Joseph Horovitz's scena 'Lady Macbeth' and in a group of cabaret and show songs towards the disc's close.

Time has inevitably taken its toll on Palmer's voice, though her way with her material is, as one might expect, penetratingly insightful. Carrie Jacobs-Bond's 'When you come to the end of a perfect day' expresses nostalgia but no trace of sentimentality, while Brahms's 'Da unten im Thale' is an object lesson in how to convey the most complex emotions by the simplest means. 'Schubert has daunted me, in terms of singing and performing it adequately', she states, yet the *Rosamunde* song is beautiful, in both its control and its melancholy.

The character portraits, meanwhile, are all unsparingly vivid. Horovitz's scena is uncompromisingly done, the text formidably projected: 'Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave' really freezes your marrow. Madeleine Dring's nightclub



Grace and subtlety: Mary Bevan and Joseph Middleton take us on a Baudelaire- and Goethe-inspired journey

prophetess looks back at faded glamour of with scathing irony and terror, while John Pritchett's 'Siren Song' is all suggestive wit and glee. Lepper is unfailingly supportive and comparably insightful: he and Palmer sound instinctively in accord with one another throughout. It's a lovely disc. Do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

'Voyages'

Bréville *Harmonie du soir* **Chabrier** *L'invitation au voyage* **Debussy** *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire* **Duparc** *L'invitation au voyage. Romance de Mignon. La vie antérieure* **Fauré** *Chant d'automne*, Op 5 No 1. *Hymne*, Op 7 No 2 **Rollinat** *Harmonie du soir. Le jet d'eau* **Schubert** *Mignon*, 'Kennst du das Land', D321. *Vier Gesänge aus 'Wilhelm Meister'*, D877 - No 2, *Heiss mich nicht reden*; No 3, *So lasst mich scheinen*; No 4, *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* **Séverac** *Les hiboux*
Mary Bevan *sop* **Joseph Middleton** *pf*
 Signum © SIGCD509 (80') • DDD • T/I



Baudelaire's 'L'invitation au voyage' and Goethe's 'Kennst du das Land' are the starting points for Mary Bevan and Joseph Middleton's 'Voyages', a beautiful, ambitious, if curiously programmed recital that explores, among other things, the

power of the mind to take us on imaginary journeys that mirror both our deepest desires and the darker corners of our psyches. Both poems express a comparable yearning for a life beyond the here and now, though the decadent city to which Baudelaire transgressively wishes to take 'my child, my sister' is far removed from the prelapsarian world from which Goethe's Mignon has been traumatically wrenched and to which she longs to return.

The immediate musical link is Duparc, whose settings effectively dictate the disc's structure. His 'L'invitation au voyage' establishes the parameters at the outset, while 'Romance de Mignon' prefaces Schubert's Mignon Lieder towards the centre, flanked by further Baudelaire settings, familiar or otherwise. Fauré's 'Chant d'automne', dating from 1870, is a great song – brooding, fierce, harmonically complex – while 'Hymne', written the same year, is more conservative and cautious. Déodat de Séverac strikingly links Baudelaire to Schubert by modelling 'Les hiboux' on 'Der Leiermann' from *Winterreise*. Debussy and Maurice Rollinat, meanwhile, are at opposite poles in their approaches: Debussy's *Cinq Poèmes* are all erotic turbulence and tristesse; cabaret composer Rollinat is knowingly urbane and quietly ironic. It's never less than

fascinating, but doesn't quite hang together: the preponderance of Baudelaire over Goethe results in the Schubert feeling like a digression at the disc's centre.

This is no reflection on the performances, however, which are often superb. Bevan's purity of tone and discreet yet telling way with words can be by turns unnerving and alluring in the Baudelaire settings. Debussy's *Cinq Poèmes* have real drama, as rapture turns to regret and pleasure itself becomes itself a torment. She generates tremendous intensity in 'Chant d'automne', and the exquisite way she floats the high-lying refrains of Rollinat's 'Le jet d'eau' is simply breathtaking. She's a fine Mignon, too, sensual in Duparc's 'Romance' – he uses a translation from which Goethe's darker imagery has been excised – more introverted in the Schubert, where the longed-for other world is perceived, at times, as being beyond the grave. Middleton, as one might expect, is marvellously insightful, playing throughout with weight as well as grace and subtlety. The disc might lack the unity that characterises the finest recitals but it's all most beautifully done. **Tim Ashley**

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REISSUES

Peter Quantrill reviews two Daniel Barenboim boxes and
Bryce Morrison on Vladimir Ashkenazy's personal selection

A life in music

Two retrospectives of Barenboim as both pianist and conductor

Selling records in London, 20 years ago and more, it was impossible to ignore the brand loyalty among customers based on their perceptions of a particular label's 'sound'. All the major companies had their adherents, who would look neither right nor left before pulling the latest EMI or Philips disc from the New Releases shelf. One or two hardened collectors would reject out of hand – or serially return – any DG album for what they claimed was overly 'analytical' sound: a description carrying with it implications of Audi's *Vorsprung durch Technik* and, one suspected, older, more hard-wired historic prejudices.

At any rate the atomisation of the music industry since then has rendered any such criticism obsolete. Many recordings are buy-ins from all manner of sources; nearly all recording engineers are now freelance, and if you back them into a corner one evening they can be found to lament the passing of those days when labels, just like orchestras, really did have a sound all their own.

Another of those labels was undoubtedly CBS, now only a name in time like two of the companies quoted above, swallowed up by international conglomerates. John McClure had produced hundreds of Bruno Walter, Stravinsky and Bernstein recordings in New York, and he was in the control-room in January 1971 for what is now the third disc of **Daniel Barenboim – A Retrospective: The Complete Sony Recordings**.

McClure produced a big, warm, slightly fuzzy soundstage in the New York Philharmonic's home at Lincoln Center. Bernstein may have left the building in 1969, entrusting the orchestra to the temporary care of George Szell, but this was still recognisably his orchestra. The 28-year-old Barenboim was content to lead rather than pull them about, though he has his own ideas about the halting progress of the *Andantino* of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony which he would later finesse while impeding its flow.



Daniel Barenboim: 81 CDs of music-making of everything from Mozart to Elgar, and much in between

The highlight of the box is an Elgar collection recorded in 1972–76 at Abbey Road studios with the London Philharmonic and beginning with the toughest nut of all, the Second Symphony. Issued separately, this would make a very attractive seven-CD set. Much has been made of Barenboim's return to Elgar in recent years. In the trenchant sweep of these earlier accounts I hear the positive influence of Barbirolli, before an obsession with underlining every chromatic Wagnerian harmony took over; a palpable delight in the unsettling wit of *Falstaff*; a warm embrace of the ceremonial and extrovert Elgar (*Cockaigne*; *Pomp and Circumstance*; even *The Crown of India* suite) and more precious still, the kind of tender care lavished on the composer's lighter music (*Carissima*; *Sospiri*; the late *Romance* for bassoon and strings) which Barenboim the pianist was bringing at the time to Mozart sonatas for EMI.

Here, too, is the best record of Barenboim's long artistic partnership with Pinchas Zukerman: tying, between them, the Elgar Concerto to the European mainstream where it belongs: free-spirited, unselfconscious music-making of the unrepeatable kind captured by Christopher Nupen in his film of *The Trout Quintet*. Four discs of Mozart concertos have not worn their years nearly so well; covered in syrup and pickled by an unpleasantly confined recording in CBS's 'London studios' (the booklet is no more forthcoming).

Back in New York, a Beethoven Violin Concerto with Isaac Stern from May 1975 is no less acoustically compromised, swimming and then drowning in the Hammerstein Ballroom of the Manhattan Center. History had come neatly full circle, however, when Barenboim returned to Kingsway Hall in March and April that year to accompany the 88-year-old Arthur Rubinstein in the Beethoven piano

concertos, seven years after recording them with Klemperer on the podium. Rubinstein sounds his years only in some unhurried tempi and a touch that's heavier physically than musically, and Barenboim's husbanding of the LPO is accordingly more attentive.

In 1975 Barenboim moved his principal orchestral responsibilities to the Orchestre de Paris, where a collection of Berlioz highlights the unpredictable and often unreliable nature of the set. Having charged through the outer movements of the *Te Deum* (all the more of a missed opportunity given the recording location in the work's original home of Saint-Eustache) he draws together the pre-Wagnerian threads (more of those later) of the 'Scène d'amour' from *Roméo et Juliette* with supple restraint. The musical virtues of a *Harold in Italy* with Pinchas Zukerman, a French concerto collection with Stern and a collection of Ravel, Debussy, Chabrier (an elephantine *España*) and Ibert (*Escale*, much lighter and more luminous) are significantly impaired by muffled, wayward balances in the lower-ceilinged Eglise Notre-Dame-du-Liban. Yet in the much more clotted textures of Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*, conducting, playing and recording all snap into focus.

DG got the best out of Barenboim both in Paris, and then in Berlin, where CBS set down a lunging, neurasthenic *Symphonie fantastique* followed by a plum-pudding of a repeat-rich Schubert symphony cycle: more suet than raisins, notwithstanding some harum-scarum finales – the *Great C major* a case in point – troubled by startlingly casual playing. On both CD and DVD there is the Berlin Wall concert of Beethoven, but the set's memorable event takes place a quarter of a century later in Vienna, where Barenboim made his debut at the New Year's Day concerts with 'a wonderfully crafted programme', as Richard Osborne remarks in his booklet appreciation, in which mutual affection and esteem shine from every bar of the underperformed Josef Strauss items: the VPO musicians allow him to play all manner of strange games with the lift-and-relax rhythms which they could play in their sleep, but certainly don't here.

For its 39-CD set of **The Complete Solo Recordings**, DG has ventured back to Barenboim's very first recordings as a teenage pianist already garlanded by the likes of Furtwängler. Made by Philips in London in 1955, now released on CD for the first time, the sessions contain some dextrous Kabalevsky and Shostakovich that give away little. It's

the unpretentious rightness of timing in a JC Bach *Andante* and Mozart's *Twinkle, Twinkle* Variations that point towards the precocious confidence and far-sightedness to be marvelled at in six Beethoven sonatas, recorded in somewhat airless stereo just three years later by RCA in New York. He rushes a few fences in the first movement of the *Waldstein*, as any 16-year-old might who could play it at all, but the finale of the *Hammerklavier* conveys how early on it was that technique liberated and did not constrict a full sense of fantasy in Barenboim's playing that made him, in Jürgen Otten's words for the booklet essay, 'a natural Romantic'.

What was crude here – say in the first movement of Op 111 – has been refined in successive cycles released by EMI, DG and then EMI again, but not necessarily improved upon. Ripeness is not all in Beethoven, perhaps especially in the sonatas where there is an always palpable, often unequal idea of man and instrument coming to terms with each other, and often to blows. These early recordings enjoy their triumphs as they occur; a superior rhythmic control of the DG *Appassionata* finale almost a quarter of a century later is accompanied by more Classically exact proportions but also a distracting awareness of phrases being placed as much as played.

DG got the best out of Barenboim both in Paris, and then in Berlin

This later cycle was made in the early 1980s when Barenboim was busier than ever (and it shows), shuttling between conducting commitments that most notably included his debut at the Bayreuth Festival in 1981 with *Tristan und Isolde*, which it is tempting to hear as a watershed, and not only for his conducting. He remembered in 1994 how 'Wagner's writings on Beethoven became very influential on my piano playing. The editions of D'Albert, von Bülow and Schnabel all seemed to stem from Wagner's ideas ... I never imagined Wagner would take over my life.'

In retrospect, the 1973-81 DG recordings of Romantic repertoire can be read as ground-work for this decisive pitching of a tent on Bayreuth's sloping lawns: no one else but Barenboim would conduct *Tristan* there for another 20 years, in a span of exclusivity only rivalled (but not surpassed) at New Bayreuth by Knappertsbusch in *Parsifal*. In search of the fullest possible sonority and longest

possible line, three Brahms variation sets (each unhelpfully allotted only a single track) and the complete Nocturnes of Chopin too readily sag into ponderous contemplation. Freshness returns when the quest is forsaken in the tumbling humour of the quicker *Songs without Words*, and the *Kinderstücke* Op 72 in Mendelssohn's deceptively simple late-style. Schumann's *Carnaval* and *Kinderszenen* are built from mahogany, rather over-bearing at close quarters and again sacrificing sharpness of individual characterisation to an urgent but somewhat generalised lyricism that finds room to flower in the more capacious structure of the C major Fantasia.

While the B minor Sonata has been withheld from this reissue, it is with Liszt that, most appropriately, Barenboim the proto-Wagnerian is most happily accommodated. The complete first year of the *Années de pèlerinage*, the three Petrarch sonnets and *Liebesträume*, the six *Consolations*, *Dante Sonata*, *Rigoletto* paraphrase and more besides: there is a generosity of gesture to this music which finds in the pianist a kindred spirit. The range of tone is sumptuous, never perfumed or overwhelming, the rubato is gentle and unforced, the pulse elastic but lively. Inevitably the culmination lies in a 1982 collection of Wagner paraphrases, ending with *Isolde's Liebestod*.

It would be over 20 years before Barenboim returned to DG. He did so in a five-CD collection of Schubert sonatas that do not bear comparison with D958 and D960, the *Impromptus* and *Moments Musicaux* from October 1977: technically spotty, rhythmically wayward and recorded too close for comfort. To demonstrate the potential resonance of a new, straight-strung instrument designed for him, he chose well in 2016 by returning to Liszt and Wagner/Liszt, where resonance is ideally balanced with clarity in a *Parsifal* transcription. The First *Mephisto Waltz* may not recover the impudent freedom of expression that marks out those Westminster recordings, but Barenboim may yet have more to say about Liszt (more misunderstood now than ever before?), whether at the keyboard or on the podium, and we would do well to listen.

Peter Quantrill

THE RECORDINGS

Daniel Barenboim – A Retrospective: The Complete Sony Recordings

Sony Classical © (43 discs + 3 DVD)
88985 39363-2

Daniel Barenboim. The Complete Solo Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon
DG © (39 discs) 479 737-1

Ashkenazy's own choice

The pianist selects some of his finest solo and chamber-music discs

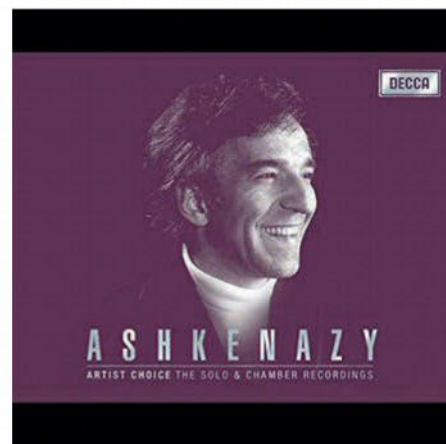
Decca's 56-CD 'Artist Choice' selection of Ashkenazy's solo and chamber-music recordings, issued to celebrate his 80th birthday (and selling for about £110), tells you of a great pianist who showed the rarest balance of sense and sensibility. How many pianists have used their complete pianistic mastery to such musical effect? The question arises when you consider Ashkenazy's belief – 'We used to be music's masters, now we are her servants' – to which I can only add that Ashkenazy is at once music's master and servant. You may wonder at the sheer quantity of his recordings (the present box is complemented by a second of his concerto performances) of which this issue is the tip of an iceberg, but the seriousness of his commitment, his view that the performance of great music is a lifelong spiritual quest requiring constant maintenance, clarification and refinement is surely the kernel of his artistry. He takes a pained view of his early recordings (including a classic disc of the Chopin Etudes), seeing them as the product of limitation, of facility at the expense of deeper qualities, even an element of the circus act. Critical of pianists he views as less than serious, he looks askance at those who see music primarily as entertainment, even if presented with phenomenal skill and aplomb. Just possibly he would concur with a recent estimate of Horowitz as 'a hollow genius', for him a figure-skater intent on cutting capers and, significantly, one who viewed his concerto appearances as little more than calling cards for his solo recitals. Even when described in *Gramophone* early in his career as 'a sort of pianistic Oistrakh', Ashkenazy might well view such a seemingly lavish compliment with suspicion.

Modestly he has always wanted to share his prodigious gifts with others. Genial, charming and accommodating (though as I found to my cost when serving with him on the 2000 Géza Anda Competition in Zurich, he can be inflammatory when sensing a less than critical view of his native Russia's politics, a bitterness reflected in his biography *Beyond Frontiers*), he has delighted in recorded partnerships with a wide variety of fellow-musicians, with Lynn Harrell, André Previn, Elizabeth Söderström, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Barbara Bonney and, exotically in Villa-Lobos, with Cristina Ortiz to name but a few. Such musical breadth reflects an indefatigable

curiosity, a quality unacceptable in Communist Russia. When I first met him he was lost in wonder at Shakespeare's *King Lear* and full of questions about the novelist John Fowles ('now there's someone you should talk to, he's much more interesting than me'). A parallel suggests itself with Alfred Cortot whose repertoire was, again, all-embracing (he conducted the first Paris performance of *Götterdämmerung* while his trio with Thibaud and Casals and partnership with Maggie Teyte are the stuff of legends). And, dare I say it, Horowitz once told me that it would never have occurred to him to play a Brahms Intermezzo without first knowing all the Lieder. There are, of course, artists of a different persuasion, tirelessly revisiting a small and fiercely guarded repertoire (Michelangeli) and yet Ashkenazy's love of music *in toto* surely tells in his vast range of recordings. He may have forlornly exclaimed, 'I have recorded too much' but he makes it difficult to believe or agree with him. His visits to the studios were both joyous and serious occasions, untarnished by dread or insecurity, the reverse of pianists such as Artur Schnabel (with his reference to 'the Abbey Road torture chamber'), Myra Hess, Krystian Zimerman and Radu Lupu.

Ashkenazy tells you that it is possible to be personal and committed without recourse to heavy underlining or idiosyncrasy

Above all there is, for Ashkenazy, a sharp division between Russia's political establishment – always a thorn in his side – and the music of his beloved Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Mussorgsky, Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich. And it is in this sense that he has remained faithful to the, for him, true nature of his Russian identity and musical roots. You only have to hear him in Rachmaninov's 24 Preludes, whether in the dark-hued melancholy of Op 23 No 1 or in his blazing, all-guns-firing bravura in the following B flat Prelude to sense a special poetic affinity. Again, in No 4 from Op 32, he is formidably aware of its brutal, ultra-Russian character. Both sets of the *Etudes-tableaux*, too, find Ashkenazy at the peak of his quality, whether in the early and



initially discarded C minor Etude from Op 33, where sombre beginnings blossom into a romanticism sumptuous even by Rachmaninov's standards, or in the baleful rhetoric of the wildly dissonant C sharp minor Etude from the same opus. Here, in particular, his intensity makes you stop to recall Boris Berezovsky's insistence that Rachmaninov has been shamefully misunderstood in the West. For him, Rachmaninov is a Russian Bach, his music alive with its own distinctive sense of polyphony. In Elizabeth Söderström Ashkenazy found a dream partner for the songs, a still neglected part of Rachmaninov's output. 'Lilacs', whether heard as a solo or in partnership, could hardly be more fragrant and in 'What Happiness' where the clouds lift from the composer's predominantly melancholy and depressive nature, you sense a meanness behind Stravinsky's sniping comment, 'Six foot six of Russian gloom', and turn instead to a more generous estimate that only a puritan could fail to respond to such beauty. I should add that the six *Morceaux*, Op 11 are a family affair where Ashkenazy is joined by his wife, Dody, and son, Vovka. Father and son set a brisk and sunny pace, too, in the *Italian Polka* telling you that Rachmaninov could occasionally let his severe, crew-cut hair down and relax with the best of them.

Staying on the Russian front, there is witty and pointed Prokofiev with a true sense of *Cinderella's* and *Romeo and Juliet's* ballet origins, a suitably bullish way with the fugue from Taneyev's Prelude and Fugue and a reminder that Ashkenazy has recorded the solo version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures* and, elsewhere, his own orchestral version, finding Ravel's transcription more elegant and sophisticated than Russian. He is cooler and less urgent than Gilels in Shostakovich's Second Sonata and less exuberant in the crazy-paving fugue of the D flat Prelude and Fugue than the brilliantly gifted Terence Judd in his



Vladimir Ashkenazy selects 56 CDs from his vast Decca discography as his own 'Artist Choice'

live Moscow performance (Chandos, 2/84) made shortly before his untimely death.

Turning from Russia to Poland, Ashkenazy first came to fame outside Russia when he won second prize in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw (first prize went to Adam Harasiewicz, who quickly found his star in the descent). Chopin has remained at the heart of his repertoire despite his later addition of the Viennese classics, of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. Unlike, say, Richard Goode, he does not feel that the intensive study of one part of the repertoire excludes the other. And hearing him in the isolated Op 45 Prelude, that mysterious and cloudy prophecy of Brahms Intermezzi, with its kaleidoscopic cadenza you sense a love and sympathy given to only the finest Chopin pianists. In the mainstream Op 28 Preludes, he is deeply sensitive to their mood-swings, to poetry created only to be abruptly terminated. Whether in the darkly swirling glitter of No 8 or in No 15 where the rain 'that droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven' changes to a heavier more menacing downpour, or in No 16, where his performance is arguably a compromise between Argerich's searing flash of lightning or Cortot's rhythmic pungency, he is never less than masterly. The point being that Chopin has a way, particularly in the First Scherzo, of hammering and insisting on his principal idea, refusing to let go and bludgeoning you into submission. Ashkenazy commands all of the rage of the B minor Scherzo but

is tender and confiding in the central Polish carol, 'Sleep little Jesus'. Less eloquent than Rubinstein in the heart-rending reply to the opening zig-zag flame, he lends a human touch to Chopin's demonic frenzy. Again, his approach to No 3 is more ordered than Argerich's manic assault (her live performance from Holland) and is teasing and mercurial in the elusive No 4, a minefield for the technically unwary and a reminder that when Chopin is in a relatively light-hearted mood he is at his most treacherous and demanding. In the Four Ballades there is no extraneous pleading, only musical power and grace. There is a natural flow to the Second Ballade's *Andantino* (making its subsequent uproar all the more vivid). My late colleague Joan Chissell once commented that the opening of the Fourth Ballade should create such a sense of wonder that it makes you experience the feelings of a blind man granted the gift of sight. Here and elsewhere, Ashkenazy tells you that it is possible to be personal and committed without recourse to heavy underlining or idiosyncrasy.

In Schumann there is so much more than mere naturalness in the 'shifting sunset vapour' of the great C major Fantasie's finale. Pollini may be more patrician, Argerich more volatile (her flashes of summer lightning) and there are other memorable recordings ranging from Moiseiwitsch to, most recently, Anderszewski. Yet Ashkenazy is deeply satisfying. He is also at his most relaxed

and affectionate when partnering Barbara Bonney where both artists shine and show a memorable poise in 'Mondnacht'. And here there is never a sign of a pianist edging towards the limelight as with Horowitz and Fischer-Dieskau. Sensing Horowitz's intention, Fischer-Dieskau only worked with him once. With Ashkenazy and Bonney you recall Schumann's ecstatic if prophetic cry, 'sometimes I could sing myself to death'.

In the French repertoire Ashkenazy's first version of Ravel's *Gaspard* (both are included here) is a wonder of fluency and evocation, whether in cold and supernatural entreaty of 'Ondine' or in 'Le gibet' where his flowing tempo adds an extra chill to an already macabre vision. In 'Scarbo', the opening slow and menacing climb erupts into a wild, if unmarked, outburst. And here, in particular, as Ashkenazy sends Ravel's nightmarish creation skittering and gibbering in motion, you are reminded of Ravel's fear that in conjuring the devil he perhaps went too far. From Ashkenazy you sense the underside of the composer's outwardly contained surface, the demons that lurked never far below, not only in *Gaspard* but also in *La valse*, the Left-Hand Piano Concerto and *Boléro*. There is a major success, too, in the *Pavane*, as natural in line and phrase as it is grave and characterful; a performance that would never have prompted Ravel's sarcasm, 'I wrote a Pavane for a dead Princess, not a dead Pavane for a Princess.'

There is too little Debussy (only *L'isle joyeuse*) and no Fauré, but even for Ashkenazy time and space are of the essence. All the Beethoven cello sonatas are here with Lynn Harrell, and although none of the solo sonatas are included there is a magnificent disc of the *Diabelli* Variations, witty and profound yet always with a sense of music too great to admit impediment. Even given toweringly great *Diabelli* Variation recordings from Schnabel, Brendel, Richter, Kovacevich and Anderszewski, Ashkenazy, in his own distinctive way, more than holds his own.

There is more, so much more, where, again, Ashkenazy shows his glory; his musical largesse and transparency. As Jed Distler so admirably puts it in his accompanying essay, 'Ashkenazy gives us the highest level of professionalism from which inspiration takes wing'.

Bryce Morrison

THE RECORDING

Ashkenazy 'Artist Choice' – The Solo & Chamber Recordings
Decca © (56 discs) 483 218-2

Opera



Richard Wigmore on Jérémie Rhorer's Don Giovanni:

'The performance generates an exciting theatrical charge, though some of the speeds border on the frenetic' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**



Neil Fisher gets to grips with Matthias Goerne's Wagner Project:

'The brief taster from Parsifal makes one long for a complete Amfortas, so completely does Goerne soak up the character's misery' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**

Bellini



Norma

Sonya Yoncheva *sop* Norma
Sonia Ganassi *mez* Adalgisa
Joseph Calleja *ten* Pollione
Brindley Sherratt *bass* Oroveso
Vlada Borovko *sop* Clotilde
David Junghoon Kim *ten* Flavio
Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House /
Sir Antonio Pappano

Stage director **Àlex Ollé**

Video director **Jonathan Haswell**

Opus Arte © **DVD** OA1247D; © **BD** OABD7225D
(154' + 15' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Extra features: Introduction to Norma; Pappano on the genius of Bellini; Cast gallery

Recorded live, September 26, 2016

Includes synopsis



This was the production that should have marked Anna Netrebko's role debut as Bellini's turbulent priestess.

Instead the Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva made her first attempt at it in a season opener at Covent Garden. Netrebko later justified withdrawing from this 2016 staging on account of the 'uninteresting' title-role. It is an unfairly bald judgement but it recognises that despite presenting us with a heroine as protector, prophet, lover, mother, warrior and victim, Bellini and his librettist are spinning so many plates that the soprano herself is virtually juggling an entire dinner service. Paradoxically, despite Norma's multifaceted qualities, it can feel by the opera's close that we still barely know who she is.

Àlex Ollé frames his answer to this question in monumental terms. The Catalan director fixates on the crushing nature of fundamentalist religion, which he envisages as a kind of Francoist cult for whom Norma toils. He shrouds the action in a gothically abstract design (sets by Alfons Flores) of countless crucifixes popping out of the gloom (nifty lighting from Marco Filibeck).

It's grandly conceived but doesn't come into focus. If Yoncheva's trousered vicar is part of an oppressed nation, they are armed to the teeth and remarkably well organised. Where Joseph Calleja's suited Pollione fits into this scenario is left opaque, and the injection of mundane modernity into the home life of Norma (her children watch *Watership Down* on TV) is jarring. The suggestion is that this '9 to 5' Norma does her priestly business only under duress, but this muddies motivations more than it enlivens them. Key confrontations are not staged with enough crackle and the fiery denouement is undercooked.

Contending with this confusing premise, Yoncheva is fearless although not flawless. 'Tremi tu', she snarls at Calleja's Pollione ('do you tremble at me') and he doesn't, really, and nor do you, for she lacks a *grandezza* that Ollé has done his best to erode. Her 'Casta Diva', delivered as a wistful daydream of lost love, convinces, and Yoncheva's seductive tone is consistently beguiling. She vaults every *bel canto* hurdle and even if she sets some of them clattering, it is less these imperfections than Yoncheva's generalised characterisation that leaves you frustrated. Plenty of time left for her to fix that.

Conducting, Antonio Pappano is in typically robust form. In the theatre there were balance issues between pit and stage; these have been resolved on this recording and you can admire how orchestra and chorus capture a heady, even cloying quality to Bellini's rapt score. Often it's not the future echo of Verdi you hear but of numinous ensembles from Wagner's *Tannhäuser* or even *Parsifal*.

Calleja is in good voice, a generous and graceful singer who generates genuine pathos. It is a pity that the normally reliable bass Brindley Sherratt is out of sorts as Oroveso, but more troubling casting is Sonia Ganassi's over-ripe Adalgisa – her gargly tone far from ideal. Nonetheless she duets with Yoncheva with ardour, evidence of the reverence for the score that she talks about on a short 'behind the scenes' documentary included on the disc. **Neil Fisher**

Donizetti



Lucia di Lammermoor

Diana Damrau *sop* Lucia
Charles Castronovo *ten* Edgardo
Ludovic Tézier *bar* Enrico
Kwangchul Youn *bass* Raimondo
Taylor Stayton *ten* Arturo
Peter Hoare *ten* Normanno
Rachael Lloyd *mez* Alisa
Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House /
Daniel Oren

Stage director **Katie Mitchell**

Video director **Margaret Williams**

Erato © **DVD** 9029 57920-5; © **BD** 9029 57920-2
(153' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DD5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Extra features: Introduction to Lucia di Lammermoor; 'The Sound of Madness: The Glass Harmonica in Lucia di Lammermoor'
Recorded live, April 25, 2016
Includes synopsis



'I have a very strong feminist agenda. My focus for this opera is 100 per cent on the female characters.' So proclaimed

director Katie Mitchell before the opening of her Royal Opera staging of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. And she did turn the spotlight firmly on Lucia – and her trusty handmaid, Alisa – who don't get a moment of respite, on stage all evening. But how? There are scenes in which Lucia simply doesn't appear.

Mitchell's 'Victorian Gothic' setting features her favourite device of a 'split screen', so that even when Lucia isn't singing, we can watch what she's up to. This is at its most controversial/distracting when, during the Wolf's Crag showdown between Lucia's brother (Enrico) and her lover (Edgardo), we watch Lucia brutally murder her unfortunate bridegroom (the hapless Arturo) on their wedding night. Arturo refuses to go gently into that good night; a bungled stabbing, a spot of strangulation and a knife in the back finally finish him off, but not before the audience on opening



Grandly conceived: Alex Ollé's production of Bellini's *Norma* at the Royal Opera House

night were guffawing with laughter. Quite what the tenor and baritone felt about their duet being upstaged in this way is open to conjecture. However, Mitchell redeems herself with a dramatic twist. It's not the murder that launches Lucia into her famous Mad Scene but her traumatic response to the miscarriage that takes place in the immediate aftermath of the murder.

In the opera house, the split stage was frequently annoying. On screen it works slightly better, with video director Margaret Williams cutting between shots like a television drama. It also allows her to filter out the sound of the constantly running water in the final scene – where Lucia clammers into a bath and slits her wrists – which had many audience members urgently crossing their legs throughout the final act. We are left, however, with other questionable directorial decisions, including Lucia and Edgardo's graveside rendezvous in Act 1 which would be a prime candidate for a Bad Sex award – should the International Opera Awards care to add this category – with Diana Damrau straddling the topless Charles Castronovo, bouncing up and down to the rhythm of their duet. It's risible stuff and all the more frustrating when Mitchell gets so much right later in the opera.

As you can tell, this is a production that divides opinion. What's not in doubt is the quality of the dramatic performance. Mitchell draws from Diana Damrau, who is compelling in the title-role. Vocally, I have reservations. Damrau's soprano is now quite blanced at the top and her cabalettas are mannered and frequently taken far too slowly. Her coloratura is finely controlled, though, with a mesmeric Mad Scene in which each movement is choreographed exactly to a particular ornament.

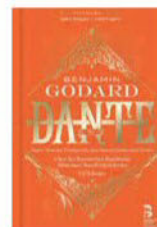
Charles Castronovo is a decent Edgardo, if a touch plain vocally, but Ludovic Tézier stands out, his firm baritone and smooth legato making him a splendid Enrico. Daniel Oren is a liability in the pit, with sluggish tempos, sometimes grinding the action to a near halt. One of the brief DVD extras is a feature on the glass harmonica, employed in the Mad Scene. **Mark Pullinger**

Godard

Dante
Edgaras Montvidas *ten*.....Dante
Véronique Gens *sop*.....Béatrice
Jean-François Lapointe *bar*.....Bardi
Rachel Frenkel *mez*.....Gemma
Andrew Foster-Williams *bass*.....
.....Shade of Virgil/Old Man
Diana Axentii *mez*.....Student

Andrew Lepri Meyer *ten*.....Herald
Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer

Ediciones Singulares © ② ES1029 (141' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Guelphs and Ghibellines, a plea for unity from the hero: but we are in Dante's Florence rather than Simon Boccanegra's

Genoa. Orchestral and chamber music by Benjamin Godard has appeared on disc in recent years; his operas have not survived in the repertory and this is perhaps the first recording of any of them, though the Berceuse from *Jocelyn* is quite well known. *Dante* was staged at the Opéra-Comique in 1890, two years after the premiere of *Jocelyn* in Brussels. The poet, who is in love with Beatrice, the fiancée of his friend Simone Bardi, is elected leader of the city. Initially reluctant, he is persuaded to accept by Beatrice. Bardi's suspicions are confirmed by Beatrice's confidante Gemma, who – herself in love with Dante – tries without success to persuade him to renounce her. The jealous Bardi first reports that the King of France's brother

has banished Dante from Florence, then forces Beatrice to take the veil. Virgil appears to Dante in a dream, conjuring up visions of Hell and Paradise, in the latter of which the apparition of Beatrice assures him that they will be reunited. When Dante awakes, the remorseful Bardi takes him to Beatrice's convent. The lovers are indeed reunited, but Beatrice dies; Dante swears to immortalise her.

Édouard Blau was an experienced author, having written or co-written several librettos including those for Lalo's *Le roi d'Ys* and Massenet's as yet unperformed *Werther*. His plotting of *Dante* is serviceable but he misses the opportunity of giving Bardi an air to express his change of heart: the renunciation of Beatrice is quite unprepared. Godard is cited as a French composer who resisted the pervasive influence of Wagner. True enough, on the evidence here, and the consequence is that you can have some fun spotting signs of other composers: Berlioz (Aeneas, Dido and Anna in *Les Troyens*), Verdi (but the mocking chorus in Act 2 recalls *Il trovatore* rather than *Un ballo in maschera*), Gounod (Faust's 'Laisse-moi contempler'). And the appearance of Paolo and Francesca in Dante's dream is a reminder of the stock horror music for plays and silent films that was once to be found inside many a piano stool. But there is much that is strong and much that is beautiful. The rocking, syncopated accompaniment to Dante's 'Tout est fini', the flutes illustrating Beatrice's 'Comme deux oiseaux', the pastoral oboe as Dante awakes from his dream, and the vigorous Prelude to the convent scene, are just a few examples.

Edgaras Montvidas and Véronique Gens make a fine pair of lovers, their ardent duet in Act 2 being one of the high spots; a little earlier on, Jean-François Lapointe powerfully expresses Bardi's political and powerful turmoil. There's excellent support from Rachel Frenkel and Andrew Foster-Williams, and Ulf Schirmer directs his Bavarian forces with the zeal of a missionary. **Richard Lawrence**

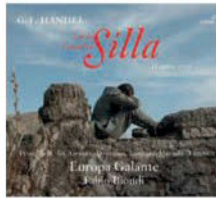
Handel

Silla (Lucio Cornelio Silla)

Sonia Prina *contr* Silla
Vivica Genaux *mez* Lepido
Martina Belli *mez* Claudio
Sunhae Im *sop* Metella
Roberta Invernizzi *sop* Flavia
Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli *sop* Celia
Luca Tittoto *bass* Il Dio
Europa Galante / Fabio Biondi

Glossa © 2 GCD923408 (113' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The plot of Handel's early London opera *Silla* (1713) concerns the dissolute and

ruthless Roman dictator Lucius Cornelius Silla, whose cruel reign of terror ended when he suddenly decided he'd had enough and abdicated in 79BC, and retired to live quietly in the country (although Plutarch claims that soon afterwards he died miserably, devoured by lice). The opera's first recording was made at a concert performance conducted by the late Denys Darlow (Somm). Fabio Biondi recorded his version of the opera last January at Vienna's Konzerthaus; the zestier Europa Galante are not necessarily superior to the understated elegance of Darlow's London Handel Orchestra, although Biondi's distinguished, mostly Italian cast deliver their lines with more dramatic energy.

Sonia Prina's gentle singing in *Silla*'s sleepy 'Dolce nume de' mortali' has sensitivity for the accompanying pair of recorders (Handel's violin parts are almost completely missing in action), but in quicker arias she hits a few rough patches of aimless meandering when embellishing. Vivica Genaux navigates tricky coloratura splendidly as Lepido, whose lover Flavia is sung eloquently by Roberta Invernizzi (their voices do not mesh pleasingly in the duet 'Sol per te, bell'idol mio' – and Biondi gets their parts the wrong way around). Claudio's bellicose 'Con tromba guerriera' with trumpets (not always perfectly in tune) and oboes is reinforced by additional thunderous timpani (rather too much of it); Martina Belli is overpowered at the expense of flamboyant dynamism. Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli's smouldering Celia has feistiness galore but a tendency to catapult up the octave crassly at the ends of phrases. Sunhae Im's rendition of Metella's pastoral 'Hai due vaghe pupillette' skips along delightfully, although some groups of orchestral triplets played staccato instead of smoothly disturbs the musical mood for no good reason.

No explanation is offered for why Biondi has substituted Handel's four-movement overture and the march that opens the first scene for different (uncredited) pieces, nor why the Musette from *Il pastor fido* (1734 version) has been added implausibly in Act 3. The climax of the final act is an elaborate confection that owes almost nothing to what Handel actually wrote, and yet Biondi cuts the essential reconciliatory duet for Silla and his long-suffering wife Metella (the music does not survive but the

printed libretto confirms that it was obviously parodied from a duet in *Rodrigo*). Listeners might enjoy Biondi's sheen of vitality but much of what lies beneath the surface is fundamentally flawed. **David Vickers**
Comparative version:

London Handel Orch, Darlow

(3/01) (SOMM) SOMMCD227/8

Mozart

Don Giovanni

Jean-Sébastien Bou *bar* Don Giovanni
Myrtò Papatanasiu *sop* Donna Anna
Julie Boulianne *mez* Donna Elvira
Anna Grevelius *mez* Zerlina
Julien Behr *ten* Don Ottavio
Robert Gleadow *bass-bar* Leporello
Marc Scoffoni *bar* Masetto
Steven Humes *bass* Commendatore
Chorus of Radio France; Le Cercle de l'Harmonie / Jérémie Rhorer

Alpha © 3 ALPHA379 (176' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, December 2016

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Jérémie Rhorer and his lively period forces won plaudits in these pages and elsewhere

for their Paris recordings of *Die Entführung* (9/16) and *La clemenza di Tito* (4/17). This new *Don Giovanni* provoked more mixed feelings, and not just because the period-instrument competition – notably Gardiner (Archiv, 8/95) and Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi, A/07) – is that much more formidable. Using a conflation of the Prague and Vienna versions – which means, inter alia, both Don Ottavio arias and the Zerlina-Leporello bondage duet – Rhorer conducts a (predominantly) up-tempo, lean-textured *Don*, one that stresses the opera's uniquely manic, driven quality. With brisk, naturally paced recitatives, the performance generates an exciting theatrical charge, though some of the speeds border on the frenetic, and transitions in the two finales can be blunt, as in the disconcerting forward jolt when Elvira announces her future career plans in the closing sextet. And while live recording has its obvious advantages, there are inevitable stage creaks and clatters – more distracting than in Rhorer's other Mozart recordings – plus varying sound perspectives, often at the expense of orchestral impact.

Rhorer's trump cards are his Giovanni and Leporello, a mutually dependent master-servant relationship that bristles with sharp-witted *italianità*. Both act brilliantly with the voice and dispatch their



Dignity and pathos: Julie Boulianne as a neurotically obsessive Donna Elvira in Jérémie Rhorer's lean-textured Don Giovanni

patter without compromising vocal quality. Like the lighter-toned Johannes Weisser in the Jacobs recording, Jean-Sébastien Bou is more upmarket Jack the lad than demonically driven anti-hero: caddish, sardonic, yet capable of fining his powerful baritone to a honeyed suavity in 'Là ci darem la mano' – though his serenade is hampered by an uncharacteristically plodding tempo. With a dash more bass in his baritone, Robert Gleadow's resourceful, garlicky Leporello is well contrasted vocally with Giovanni. Gleadow sings with all the comic flair one could wish, yet musters an aristocratic elegance as he apes his master in the catalogue aria.

The Don's past conquests and non-conquests are more problematic. Best is the Greek soprano Myrtò Papatanasiu, whose Anna makes up in tenderness and vulnerability what she lacks in vocal grandeur (Olga Pasichnyk's performance for Jacobs is in similar mould). If 'Or sai chi l'onore' stretches her to the limit and beyond, she leaves you in no doubt of Anna's love for Ottavio both in a gracefully dispatched 'Non mi dir' and in the duet in the final sextet. You could never accuse Julie Boulianne of under-characterising the neurotically obsessive Elvira, torn between love, shame and indignation. She catches, too, Elvira's new-found dignity and pathos in her Act 2

scena. Yet the role lies rather high for her mezzo, and her vibrato grows uncomfortably wide under pressure. Anna Grevelius, likewise a mezzo, has the requisite charm for Zerlina, though disappoints in a fluttery and ill-tuned 'Vedrai carino'. Marc Scoffoni makes a sturdy, cussed Masetto, and Julien Behr's forthright and mainly stylish singing ensures that Ottavio is no cipher in breeches. Both his arias deserve their applause. But the Commendatore, baritone rather than bass, fatally lacks baleful gravitas in the supper scene. Indeed, his voice is less imposing, certainly less firm, than Giovanni's and Leporello's. Which can never be right.

Richard Wigmore

Puccini

Tosca

Kristine Opolais *sop*..... Tosca
 Marcelo Álvarez *ten*..... Cavaradossi
 Marco Vratogna *bar*..... Scarpia
 Alexander Tsymbalyuk *bass*..... Angelotti
 Peter Tantsits *ten*..... Spoletta
 Peter Rose *bass*..... Sacristan
 Douglas Williams *bass-bar*..... Sciarione
 Walter Fink *bass*..... Gaoler
 Cantus Juvenum Karlsruhe; Vienna Philharmonia
 Chorus; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra /
 Sir Simon Rattle

Stage director Philipp Himmelmann

Video director Andreas Morell

EuroArts © DVD 206 4178; © Blu-ray 206 4174

(125' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Baden-Baden Easter Festival, April 2017

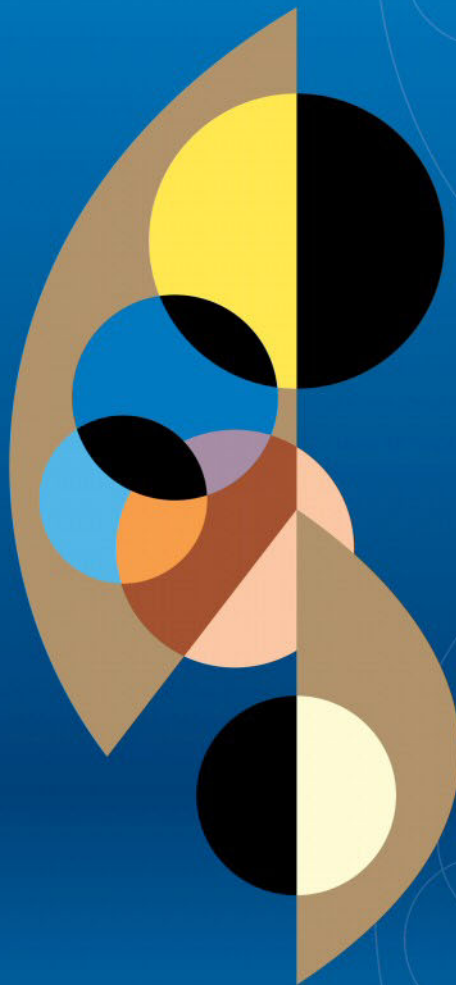
Includes synopsis



'Ecco un artista' says Tosca as her boyfriend flops to the floor, in fact mortally wounded and not showing any more theatrical talent

than he has hitherto suggested. It's tempting to wonder if the twist-finale of Puccini's opera is meant to mark not just the final curtain for Cavaradossi but also for any suggestion that the jobbing painter had much artistic temperament to begin with. The true stage animals of *Tosca* are the eponymous singer and her oleaginous tormentor, Baron Scarpia.

There are interesting ideas about art – what it is, who controls it – bubbling through Philipp Himmelmann's 2017 production of the Baden-Baden Easter Festival and the Berlin Philharmonic, only Simon Rattle's second foray into Puccini. They do not come to the boil, however, and the result, although decently captured on DVD/Blu-ray, is oddly flavourless.



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Rattle and his orchestra add both depth and gloss: to hear the shimmer of the Berlin strings in the eerie swells of the *Te Deum* is enough to absolve the conductor of his reverential tempos. There are plenty of other lovely touches: the playful but lingering preamble to 'Recondita armonia'; the evocative 'dawn' prelude to Act 3.

So you can be stirred by this orchestra – but you do need to be shaken elsewhere. Himmelmann, with modern, metallic designs from Raimund Bauer, attempts a kind of deconstruction. We're in a world where both religion and art seem to have been co-opted by the state: Peter Rose's unusually dominant Sacristan marshals choristers who don't seem especially into God, and are equally nonplussed by Cavaradossi's high-concept digital portrait of the Marchesa Attavanti. Marco Vratogna's Scarpia leads a small army of German architects from the 1990s with ash-blond ponytails and steel-rimmed glasses. They appear to have banished Christianity from Rome and replaced it with a cult of surveillance.

With few of the usual *Tosca* trappings, the cast respond with varying success. Marcelo Álvarez is a veteran Cavaradossi, who, once over a slightly yelped opening aria, shapes the text imaginatively and sings with tenderness and generosity, although you'll never believe he's a revolutionary. The most effective moment, dramatically and musically, is when he and Kristine Opolais's *Tosca* are cut adrift in Act 3, their hymn to liberty and love clearly a hopeless sham, just a bleak foretaste of their perfunctory executions.

Yet let's face it: this isn't the stuff of *Tosca*. In a grander, gaudier show, Opolais would hit more buttons than she does here. She sings as attentively as she acts, bites into lines like 'Questo è il bacio di *Tosca*!' as the fruit knife does its messy business, and projects 'Vissi d'arte' with feeling, albeit on thinish tone. Yet it isn't enough: it feels as if this *Tosca*'s claws have been trimmed by the production's studied neutrality, and Opolais's showdown with Vratogna's smooth-voiced but equally defanged Scarpia is simply dull. The Italian sings decently (albeit less imposingly than Alexander Tsymbalyuk's Angelotti) but the production lets him be neither truly alluring nor truly repulsive. 'How you detest me', he drawls. If only. **Neil Fisher**

Rameau

Les Indes galantes

Lisette Oropesa *sop* Hébé/Zima
Goran Jurić *bass* Bellone
Ana Quintans *sop* L'Amour/Zaire
Tareq Nazmi *bass* Osman/Alì

Elsa Benoit *sop* Emilie
Cyril Auvity *ten* Valère/Tacmas
François Lis *bass* Huascar/Don Alvaro
Anna Prohaska *sop* Phani/Fatime
Mathias Vidal *ten* Don Carlos/Damon
John Moore *bar* Adario
Balthasar Neumann Choir; Munich Festival Orchestra / Ivor Bolton

Stage director **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui**

Video director **Andy Sommer**

BelAir Classiques (P) DVD BAC138; (P) BAC438

(3h' + 14' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonus: Behind the Scenes

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, July 2016

Includes synopsis



It's such a simple solution that it's hard to believe it has taken this long for the opera world to figure it out. How do you solve

a problem like the French Baroque tradition of *opéra-ballets*? Hire a director-choreographer to blend both elements of the production into a coherent, contemporary whole. Not everything in Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's production of *Les Indes galantes* is completely in focus and not everything in his restless production translates to the limited viewpoint of DVD, but the spirit behind the Bavarian State Opera production is precisely right – Baroque divertissement reinvented as 21st-century political and social meditation, dance and music working together as one.

With its episodic structure and colonial themes, Rameau's opera is a tough ask for a contemporary audience. No sooner do you find a foothold in one world, or invest in one set of characters, than you are whisked away to the next. Award-winning Belgian choreographer Cherkaoui addresses this by dissolving the divides between the opera's five worlds, carrying characters across from one episode to the next, and creating a piece that's more a set of dramatic variations on a theme than a conventional narrative.

The theme? Displacement, otherness and exile. All the usual visual tropes – refugee camps, barbed wire fences, military regimes, uniforms – are present and correct; but, used here as part of a moving collage, a constant flow of images and ideas, choreography and song, they feel less strident, less obviously superimposed on Rameau's score. It helps that Ivor Bolton's account is fleet and light of foot. Energising and alert, the swaying delicacy of its many dances (there's some

particularly lovely solo woodwind-playing from the Munich Festival Orchestra) only reinforcing the rare moments of rustic emphasis.

The cast, too, many of whom take multiple roles, is a uniformly fine one. Cyril Auvity is ardent and glowing right to the top of his extraordinary range, first as Valère and then as Tacmas. If his voice is silver-bright, then John Moore's Adario is all warm gold; what an impressive performance this is from the young American baritone. Ana Quintans and Anna Prohaska share the female laurels, and the dramatic interplay between them offers some of the production's most touching moments.

This isn't a show that lends itself naturally to DVD but as a point of reference and a marker for future concept-treatments of French Baroque it's invaluable. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Rossini

'Amor fatale'

Armida – D'amor al dolce impero^a. **La donna del lago** – Tanti affetti in tal momento ... Fra il padre e fra l'amante^a. **Guillaume Tell** – Ils s'éloignent enfin ... Sombre forêt, désert triste et sauvage; Sur la rive étrangère. **Maometto II** – Giusto ciel, in tal periglio^a; Quella morte che s'avanza ... Invan la perfida ... Sì, ferite: il chieggo, il merto ... Madre, a te che sull'empio. **Moïse et Pharaon** – Quelle horrible destinée! ... Grand Dieu! j'implore ta clemence ... Je l'aimais! je suis se présence^b. **Otello** – Assisa a piè d'un salice. **Semiramide** – Bel ragazzo lusinghier
Marina Rebeka *sop* with ^b**Julia Heller** *mez* ^b**Levy Sekgapane** *ten* ^b**Gianluca Margheri** *bar* ^{ab}**Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Marco Armiliato**

BR-Klassik (P) 900321 (69' • DDD)



After a Mozart disc, given a guarded welcome by Richard

Wigmore in these pages (Warner Classics, 10/14), the Latvian soprano Marina Rebeka turns to a composer who is something of a speciality. And there's certainly some mightily impressive singing here as she rattles her way through some of the trickiest arias of the *bel canto* coloratura repertoire, and does so with a voice that is arguably pushing more towards lirico-spinto territory.

It's a big, glossy sound, with an evenly produced – and somewhat uniformly applied – lusciousness of timbre. The singing is completely secure, and her coloratura generally impressively accurate, only occasionally losing some focus and tension in the very trickiest passages. That

her lovely account of Elena's 'Tanti affetti in tal momenti' is followed by a 'Fra il padre e fra l'amante' taken at a slightly cautious tempo might hint at the limits of this part of her technical arsenal (compared with such singers as Joyce DiDonato here, she is a little on the pedestrian side).

She takes no prisoners elsewhere, though, and certainly has a good line in imperiousness as Semiramide and Armida. She's tireless, too, in the big scene that concludes *Maometto II*. But the flipside of her security can be a slight lack of characterisation. Her Desdemona is beautifully sung but hardly heartbreaking, for example, and she doesn't always imbue the coloratura with dramatic purpose. Matters are not helped by a generally muddy way with the words, whether in French or Italian.

Maybe one would mind less had BR-Klassik provided texts or translations. Instead we have lengthy, sparsely laid-out biographies (including one for the Munich Radio Orchestra, whose playing for Marco Armiliato is largely excellent). It's good, though, to have a chorus on hand, as well as a trio of additional singers. They contribute well to a disc that is by any standards an impressive Rossinian calling card from a formidable singer. **Hugo Shirley**

Saariaho

Only the Sound Remains – Two Noh Plays

1 Always Strong (Tsunemasa)

Philippe Jaroussky *countertenor* Spirit

Davóne Tines *bass-bar* Priest

2 Feather Mantle (Hagoromo)

Davóne Tines *bass-bar* Fisherman



Philippe Jaroussky *countertenor* Tennin (Angel)

Elija Kankaanranta *kantele* **Camilla Hoitenga** *fl*

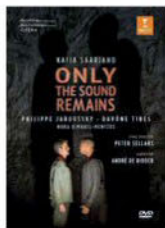
Niek KleinJan *perc* **Netherlands Chamber Choir** /

André de Ridder

Stage director **Peter Sellars**

Erato  9029 57539-5;  9029 57539-1 (106' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam, March 2016. Includes synopsis



One part of the booklet describes Kaija Saariaho's 'two Noh plays' and another 'two short operas inspired by Noh dramas'. We could spend a long time arguing whether there's a world of difference between the two or just focus on the fact that whatever 'the piece' is, it isn't particularly entertaining, challenging or musically significant. If taken as two operas, both would, to the outsider, suggest

opera has become a pretentious domain wrapped up in its own world of empty rhetorical gesture.

Saariaho's music is as frustrating as it is fleetingly refreshing. We hear an assortment of sounds borrowed from other cultures at the start of the first piece, *Always Strong*, before an absorbing focus sets in (hearing a Finnish kantele sitting within a roughly Japanese texture and sound-style is interesting – two cultures beloved of one another – but the material isn't strong enough to get Saariaho off the hook). Just when the heights of tension in the material begin to push Saariaho into stripping back and giving us something with power, habitual tics emerge and the music gets irritating. Vocally, those tics seem to stem from the composer's obsession with the textural beauty of Philippe Jaroussky's voice, which leads her to constrict it to a string of carbon copy florid gestures that quickly become clichés.

Ditto the physical language welded to those gestures by director Peter Sellars. Yes, there is some breathtaking stagecraft in both pieces, including the technically incomprehensible silhouette effects bestowed upon Jaroussky in *Always Strong* and the exquisite dancing of Nora Kimball-Mentzos in *Feather Mantle* (although it belongs on its own). But the physical language of Jaroussky in particular feels affected and laughably overwrought. If the whole lot were parodied, it would hardly look or sound any different.

When dramatic tension comes, it does so mostly from the suggestive acting of bass-baritone Davóne Tines, especially in *Feather Mantle*, whose narrative is more theatrically fertile. Jaroussky looks like a spare part in this piece, even more so as the writing for his voice hasn't adequately shifted or developed and Tines feels comparatively alive to the world, in every sense. And then, again, there is the music – increasingly drifting into irrelevance as the drama sharpens up. I like Saariaho's use of sliding parallel glissandos in this piece but it's about all there is of interest, along with some inventive voice-leading from the offstage vocal quartet. Jaroussky's vocal agility and clarity is never in doubt. Tines's baritone seems to be invested with huge subtlety of colour and expression but the fragmentary nature of what he sings stops you listening properly.

There is a chance my negative reaction to these pieces is born of ignorance in the face of staggering, visionary masterpieces that will resonate in centuries to come – that I haven't noticed the parameters of dramatic language and gesture shifting. But here and now, this DVD bored me rigid. **Andrew Mellor**

Schoenberg



Moses und Aron

Thomas Johannes Mayer *bar* Moses

John Graham-Hall *ten* Aron

Julie Davies *sop* Young Girl

Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mez* Invalid Woman

Nicky Spence *ten* Young Man

Michael Pflumm *ten* Naked Youth

Chae Wook Lim *bar* Man

Christopher Purves *bar* Another Man/Ephraimite

Ralf Lukas *bass-bar* Priest

Chorus and Orchestra of the Paris Opéra /

Philippe Jordan

Stage director **Romeo Castellucci**

Video director **François-René Martin**

Bel Air Classiques  BAC136;  BAC436

(113' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 2015

Includes synopsis



At least my colleague David Patrick Stearns will be pleased. He eagerly anticipated the release of this film in his Collection

piece (8/16) and, in many different ways, it doesn't disappoint. The musical standards are of an exceptionally high order, starting with the chorus of the Paris Opéra. Discreet instrumental doubling of some parts aids both execution and comprehension from the outset. To really belt out 12-note canon and exclamation requires prodigious levels of confidence and preparation; to do it in pitch black and blinding light is something else.

After an uningratiating start, John Graham-Hall does more than cope with Aron's punishing tessitura: more accurate and agile than Thomas Moser in Vienna for Reto Nickler's production (Arthaus, 8/07), he forms a vividly directed double act with Thomas Johannes Mayer, who pitches much of his *Sprechstimme*. The effect is not only gratifying, in that more of what Schoenberg actually wrote is audible, but it brings a warm humanity to their scenes as brothers who can't help finishing each other's sentences even while talking at cross purposes.

Other fine English singers are involved, though you will be hard pressed to identify most of them as they emerge from, and are just as rapidly absorbed within, the heat of battle: musical, theological, theatrical. So: we need to talk about the show. Act 1 takes place in mist behind a blurring gauze from which Aron's transforming symbols of God made manifest (a missile, radioactive isotopes and a phial of blood) emerge with awful, gradual recognition. God is very



Kristina Opolais (Tosca) and Marcelo Alvarez (Cavaradossi) star in Puccini's *Tosca* from Baden-Baden – see review on page 89

present, even if no one can find him. There, in a nutshell, is the story of Moses.

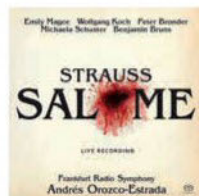
As in his Brussels *Parsifal* (filmed for DVD, 2/14) and his Munich *Tannhäuser* (not yet), Romeo Castellucci brings live animals and the most subtle use of video into play. Previous of his own theatre pieces put the stuff of life (light, water, body fluids and waste) at the service of rituals such as the Dante-inspired *Inferno* and *Paradiso* (on YouTube and unmissable). Here it's blood and tape as carriers of memory – and ink, our liquid of language. Everyone is covered in the stuff during the course of Act 2, including the Golden Calf himself, a magnificent Charolais bull. In the pit, Philippe Jordan performs miracles of his own in bringing tremendous éclat to the ritual dances of Act 2, where Schoenberg was surely saying to his West Coast neighbour Stravinsky, anything you can do ... **Peter Quantrill**

R Strauss

Salome

Emily Magee *sop*.....Salome
Wolfgang Koch *bass-bar*Jokanaan
Peter Bronder *ten*.....Herod
Michaela Schuster *mez*.....Herodias
Benjamin Bruns *ten*.....Narraboth
Claude Eichenberger *mez*.....Page
Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /
Andrés Orozco-Estrada
 Pentatone ② PTC5186 602 (113' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Alte Oper, Frankfurt, September 10, 2016
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



With a coupling of *Ein Heldenleben* and *Macbeth* released on Pentatone last year

(11/16), Andrés Orozco-Estrada and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony already showed themselves to be impressive Straussians. They offer something even finer to my ears in Strauss's breakthrough operatic score, recorded at a concert in Frankfurt in the autumn of 2016.

Orozco-Estrada's approach is unrushed and often expansive, and certainly less concerned with the slash-horror effects that come up afresh on the recently remastered Solti set (Decca, 10/17) – remarkably, the present recording also takes nearly a quarter of an hour longer than Solti's. But there's no lack of detail in Pentatone's rich sound, and I found myself hearing plenty of things afresh: the divided viola and cello harmonics and glissandos as Salome and Herod discuss the silver charger (disc 2, track 3, from 0'36"), or the needly harp describing a crown of thorns (disc 1, track 12, 0'35"). For once, too, we have an organ towards the end of the final scene that communicates something suitably uncanny.

And though Orozco-Estrada's approach is leisurely by the clock, he offers no shortage of energy and shock and shudder. After holding back initially, he whips up a storm in the big interlude after Jokanaan's curse, and he offers us a Dance that alternates febrile energy with languid, hip-swinging seductiveness. The big orchestral outburst after Salome issues her demand for a final time is properly shattering.

That moment is also demonstrative of the set's other great asset: Emily Magee's Salome spits out her words as part of a characterisation of the Judean princess that's compellingly real and convincing. Listen, too, to the taut, intense monodrama she and Orozco-Estrada make of the minutes as she awaits the executioner's strike. Magee's is a voice that swells into phrases rather than attacks them, and is perhaps a touch more opaque in its colour than ideal, but she sounds fresh throughout and sings the big final scene compellingly – an especially impressive achievement given that this was recorded live.

The rest of the cast includes singers similarly experienced in their roles, and although Wolfgang Koch's timbre is too smooth for him to represent a properly threatening and authoritative presence as Jokanaan, he sings the role generously and reliably. Benjamin Bruns is an urgent and dramatically involving Narraboth and Peter Bronder and Michaela Schuster are a vivid

pair as Herod and Herodias. Some members of the extended cast are a little disappointing by comparison but Sung Ha stands out as an eloquent First Nazarene.

In a crowded catalogue this newcomer is unlikely to replace old favourites, but it offers an unusually persuasive aural drama and a deeply musical account of the score – a compelling listen featuring a fine cast and expertly conducted. It's a set that can be warmly recommended. **Hugo Shirley**

Wagner

Der fliegende Holländer

Samuel Youn *bass-bar* Holländer
Ingela Brimberg *sop* Senta
Kwangchul Youn *bass* Daland
Nikolai Schukoff *ten* Erik
Kai Rüütel *mez* Mary
Benjamin Bruns *ten* Steersman
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Real, Madrid / Pablo Heras-Casado

Stage director **Álex Ollé**

Video director **Stéphane Verité**

Harmonia Mundi (DVD + Blu-ray) HMD980 9060/61

(4h 49' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2016

Includes synopsis



In a short booklet essay, the director of this *Fliegende Holländer*, Álex Ollé, tells us that he and his creative team

constantly asked themselves the same question: 'Could a story like this happen today?' In trying to answer it, he goes on, they came across the Bangladeshi port of Chittagong, where old ships are taken or dumped, to be dismantled or to rot.

This forms the basis for his staging and explains some of the production's more unexpected touches. The Spinning Chorus features a group of women on a dirty beach in headresses sorting through junk. Erik is a mercenary soldier; we're in a place of poverty and bartering, where one might actually imagine a sea captain giving away his daughter for the right price.

And as you'd expect from a Fura dels Baus show, there's an impressive scenic grandeur on display. Video projections conjure up the storm-tossed sea in the Overture (although the camera direction spends most of it concentrating on the pit) as well the ghostly crew that clambers up the prow of the vast vessel that appears at the start of Act 1 – gradually taken apart as the evening progresses. The sandy stage floor, variously lit, suggests the bottom of the ocean as much as a beach, and the Dutchman's arrival

is marked by the descent of an enormous anchor from the flies.

Indeed, the fact that he seems often to be singing underground makes one think as much of Alberich as Wagner's ghostly aquatic wanderer. This might also have something to do with Samuel Youn's singing of the role: always at a high pressure, and with a characterisation that, rather than offering tragic nobility, tends to range between snarling anger and borderline insanity. One notices more than ever, then, the shifts in the music's idiom between fateful *Weltschmerz* and the jollier exchanges with Daland, here sung by the ever-reliable Kwangchul Youn.

There's nevertheless an undeniable intensity in Samuel Youn's exchanges with Ingela Brimberg's Senta, who fills out her phrases impressively. Nikolai Schukoff is excellent as Erik, Benjamin Bruns is an eloquent Steersman and Kai Rüütel a pleasingly rich-voiced Mary. Pablo Heras-Casado conducts a swift, efficient account of the score, played well enough by the Madrid orchestra, but doesn't really plumb the depths. Nor, ultimately, does the production. On its own terms, though, it's an impressive and engaging show.

Hugo Shirley

Wagner

Die Walküre

Peter Seiffert *ten* Siegmund
Anja Harteros *sop* Sieglinde
Anja Kampe *sop* Brünnhilde
Vitalij Kowaljow *bass* Wotan
Christa Mayer *mez* Fricka
Georg Zeppenfeld *bass* Hunding
Alexandra Petersamer *mez* Helmwig
Brit-Tone Müllertz *sop* Ortlinde
Christina Bock *mez* Waltraute
Simone Schröder *contr* Rossweisse
Stepanka Pucalkova *mez* Siegrune
Katrin Wundsam *mez* Grimgerde
Katharina Magiera *mez* Schwertleite
Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

Stage director **Vera Nemirova**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

C Major Entertainment (DVD + Blu-ray) 742808;

(3h 55' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus,

Salzburg, April 5-17, 2017



A bizarre concept: a 50th-anniversary celebration of Karajan's Salzburg Easter Festival by his major disciple Christian Thielemann which comprises a new production of that event's opening

opera on a painstaking recreation of the original 1967 setting by Günther Schneider-Siemssen.

Stage director Vera Nemirova (who has already created her own *Ring* for Frankfurt, issued on Oehms) is, of course, restricted severely by the set's Karajan-dictated stripped-down imitations of Wieland Wagner, sculpted tree and ring-shaped platform included. You may smile ironically at the thought of Karajan's posthumous reactions to her new conceits attempting to break up the potentially epic monotony of a staging in these conditions. Siegmund's Act 1 narration of his flight is upstaged by Hunding's aggressively sexual groping of Sieglinde – but the hero's reaction is to reach into the rucksack he conveniently carries for tobacco and filter papers and roll up a cigarette. Later the back wall in Act 2 is covered with a mirroring of the chalk-drawn dramatis personae of *The Ring* that Wotan and Brünnhilde have been making on the floor to help them understand Wotan's monologue. That, plus the addition of some ram-dressed chair carriers for Fricka and some self-sacrificing heroes for the Valkyries in Act 3, is about it for original production ideas.

A for effort for the production team – but the real interest of this release is musical. Thielemann's fourth recording of this opera assembles his strongest cast yet, one more than capable of filling the wide spaces of the Grosses Festspielhaus. The top of Peter Seiffert's voice may no longer be a thing of beauty but it, and his instinct for the personality of Siegmund, are very much there. Harteros is a clearly projected, emotional Sieglinde. Zeppenfeld, nervous of his marriage as soon as he first sees Siegmund at home, is a convincing wife-abusing neurotic in good, un-woolly voice. Kowaljow's Wotan is best when he is frighteningly angry. He and Thielemann present the Act 2 monologue with a detail and colour that is almost Clemens Krauss-level and, on the repeated 'Das Ende', even manage a reasonable facsimile of Hans Hotter's memorable dynamics. Anja Kampe, as always, is bright, forward, intelligent and the centre of attention onstage. She doesn't (quite) yet manage Brünnhilde's final plea in Act 3 with the lyrical dynamite of Frida Leider or Anne Evans but is a nicely detailed interpreter of her confrontations in Act 2. Christa Mayer is more self-doubting than usual as a cleanly sung Fricka but is then given extra silent appearances to confirm and gloat over Siegmund's fall. The Valkyries, despite a boringly safe stand-and-deliver staging, make some vocal impact.

The sound of Thielemann's orchestra, darker-sounding than usual from more Western-based orchestras and with plangent winds and an aggressively present timpani balance, is one of the pleasures of this set. Thielemann has long been a 'stop-goer' in Wagner with large tempo contrasts. Now, perhaps following his Bayreuth *Tristan*, he is even more daringly slow in his pointing up of love and suffering. For that and the cast this set is valuable. **Mike Ashman**

Wagner

'The Wagner Project'

Der fliegende Holländer - Overture; Die Frist ist um. **Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg** - Prelude, Act 3; Was duftet doch der Flieder. **Parsifal** - Prelude, Act 1; Ja, wehe! Wehe! Weh über mich!; Good Friday Music. **Das Rheingold** - Abendlich strahlt der Sonne Auge. **Tannhäuser** - Wie Todesahnung ... O du, mein holder Abendstern. **Tristan und Isolde** - Prelude, Act 1; Tatest du's wirklich? Liebestod. **Die Walküre** - Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind!

Matthias Goerne bar **Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Harding**
Harmonia Mundi ® ② HMM90 2250/51
(122' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



When does an album become a project? Perhaps when it is spread

over two CDs, as Matthias Goerne and Daniel Harding's collaboration is, or when it is devoted to a sole composer, in this case Wagner, whose work you cannot really dip into track by track but have to fall into head first.

Collections of Wagnerian extracts used to be called 'bleeding chunks' and it isn't just Goerne's wounded Amfortas from *Parsifal* who is dripping here. There isn't a wholly satisfactory way to explore the characters of Wotan, Sachs, Amfortas et al with corresponding orchestral interludes – just as you're building up the existential agony, it's time for another opera – but this selection is particularly disjointed and the labels given to the album's two parts, 'Of Gods and Men' and 'Redemption', are so vague as to be more or less irrelevant.

And the jump-cuts really chafe. The *Tristan* Prelude and Liebestod are the strange sandwich wrapping to King Mark's monologue. The Valhalla monologue from *Rheingold* ends before Wotan can actually join his family on the Rainbow Bridge, and there's no coda to Wolfram's Evening Star from *Tannhäuser*, just a cliff-edge. As

for sending us out on a high, Goerne's final contribution is Amfortas's Act 3 lament over the corpse of his father Titirel. Redemption is left to the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra for the Good Friday Music which marks Project Wagner's finale.

Still, Goerne does misery masterfully. The brief taster from *Parsifal* makes one long for a complete Amfortas, so completely does Goerne soak up the character's misery. His Dutchman, too, queasy with self-loathing, is a frightening portrait of a broken mind. Mark's monologue, though it lies low for an essentially baritone voice, is lacking in kingly fury but high on wounded melancholy, with Goerne's partner in woe the SRSO's bass clarinetist, lowing alongside.

The flip side to Goerne's magisterial introspection is that sometimes the characters deserve bigger personalities. His lyrical phrasing and Lieder-like unspooling of Hans Sachs's 'Was duftet doch der Flieder' from *Die Meistersinger* is impeccable but missing is Sachs's geniality and warmth. As Goerne's Wotan kisses Brünnhilde to sleep, the moment is so intimate that (depending on your speakers) you might even feel a peck on the cheek. Yet this isn't a god to terrify or awe you.

Once heard, however, Goerne's Wagner is hard to shift from your mind: he has something new to bring to this repertory and his next steps with it onstage should be fascinating if he can find the right partners. Here, Harding offers him space and breadth and draws clean, bright textures from his players. In orchestral passages recorded by all the greats, that isn't always enough: the strings lack some depth and colour, and tempos, particularly in the extracts from *Parsifal*, tend to the slack. Orchestra and conductor are at their most imaginative in a shimmering, almost playful Liebestod. **Neil Fisher**

'Quella fiamma'

Bononcini Griselda - Per la gloria d'adorarvi
Caccini Le nuove musiche - No 8, Amarilli
Caldara La costanza in amor vince l'inganno - Sebben, crudele **Capricornus** Prothimia suavissima, Book 2 - Sonata No 4 **Carissimi** Vittoria, mio core **Cavalli** Il Giasone - Delizie, contenti **Cesti** Orontea - Intorno all'idol mio **Conti** Doppo tante e tante pene **Durante** Concerto No 1 - Introduction. Danza, danza, fanciulla gentile. Vergin, tutto amor **Falconieri** Il primo libro di canzone - No 15, Passacalle
Handel Alcina - Ah! mio cor, schernito sei. Giulio Cesare in Egitto - Piangerò la sorte mia **Legrenzi** Eteocle e Polinice - Che fiero costume

A Marcello Oboe Concerto, S D935 - 2nd movt

J-P-E Martini Plaisir d'amour **Paisiello**

La molinara - Nel cor più non mi sento **Parisotti**

Se tu m'ami **Porpora** Cello Concerto in G -

2nd movt. Sonata, Op 2 No 3 - 1st movt

A Scarlatti L'honestà negli amori - Già il sole dal Gange. Pompeo - O cessate di piagarmi

Orfeo 55 / Nathalie Stutzmann contr

Erato ® 9029 57652-9 (73' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Nathalie Stutzmann identifies a 'Madeleine' moment for her

in this recording, recalling that Caldara's 'Sebben crudele' was 'the first aria I worked on'. Doubtless there are more singers out there who would experience the odd Proustian hit from this disc, which samples the three volumes of Italian Baroque opera arias published in the 1880s by musicologist Alessandro Parisotti as *Arie antiche*. The collection was designed to help train singers in *bel canto* style, and still does so today, so there will be many for whom these gem-like arias by the likes of Porpora, Durante and Scarlatti will strike a chord of recognition. Parisotti published them with piano accompaniment, of course, and Stutzmann's project here is to go back to the original sources and restore them to Baroque condition. A long list of orchestrator credits raises slight suspicions that not all have been located, but the sounds are convincing, and the rootling around has even resulted in reattribution of 'Marcello's' 'Quella fiamma' to Francesco Conti.

One has to admire Parisotti's taste, as well as (not the first time) Stutzmann's rich, wine-dark voice, noble emotional articulation and, when required, flashing virtuosity. Some of these arias are simply ravishing in her hands, from Scarlatti's touching vignette of wounded love 'O cessate di piagarmi' to Cesti's 'Intorno all'idol mio' (sung with a superb close concentration that has you hanging on every word), and from Caccini's haunting 'Amarilli mia bella' to Durante's infectiously swinging 'Danza, danza, fanciulla gentile'. At the same time there is no denying that Handel is the giant here, his two arias in a different league of expressive scope and profundity from anything else on the disc; Stutzmann obviously relishes the opportunity to occupy soprano territory in a magnificently moving 'Ah! mio cor'.

She conducts her Orfeo 55 orchestra with a sure hand, too, though a close-ish balance is less than kind to the strings. But she is the star all right, one of the great baroque singers of our day. **Lindsay Kemp**

Books



Patrick Rucker traces the invention and early history of the piano:

'It is perhaps no coincidence that the birth of the piano occurred in an artistic milieu where opera was the most popular form of entertainment'



Liam Cagney on an ambitious theory of modernism:

'There are moments of genius, but Brodsky's thesis is so convolutedly kitchen-sink complex that it teeters on the brink of incoherence'

Bartolomeo Cristofori and the Invention of the Piano

By Stewart Pollens

Cambridge University Press, HB, 400pp, £74.99

ISBN 978-1-316-15629-2



In his touching introduction to *Bartolomeo Cristofori and the Invention of the Piano*, Stewart

Pollens describes his first chance encounter with a Cristofori piano. During the time when he was apprenticed to the harpsichord builder John Challis, Pollens happened to be at the Metropolitan Museum in New York when he heard a curator playing the museum's 1720 instrument for a group of students. So impressed was he by the 'beautiful sounds' emanating from the instrument, Pollens vowed that, once his apprenticeship was completed, his first replica would be of Cristofori's piano.

This was of course but the beginning of a distinguished career. Pollens went on to serve for three decades as conservator of musical instruments at the Met. In 1995 *The Early Pianoforte* brought important light to bear on Cristofori and his followers in Italy, important builders on the Iberian peninsula, as well as Silbermann's experiments in Germany. Subsequently he collaborated on important studies of the Amati, Stradivari and Guarneri violins at the Library of Congress, on Guarneri 'del Gesù', and on François-Xavier Tourte. Dispassionate research made his acclaimed *Stradivari* (2010) an important corrective on widely held ideas about the legendary violin maker.

This new book carefully evaluates and collates a broad range of archival sources to bring the genius who invented the piano to life as never before for anglophone readers. While relatively little is known of Cristofori's early life in Padua, where he was born in 1655, by his early 30s his achievements were significant enough to

attract the attention of the Grand Prince of Tuscany, Ferdinando dei' Medici. At first Cristofori was reluctant to accept the invitation of his 24-year-old patron and leave Padua for Florence. Only the offer of a generous stipend and rent-free, furnished lodgings finally persuaded him. Cristofori's arrival in Florence in April 1688 began 44 years of service to the Medici Court and its lavish musical establishment. There he supervised and maintained the collections at the Pitti Palace and at the Villa di Pratolino, just north of Florence, while producing a number of extraordinary instruments still extant – harpsichords, spinets, clavichords and, of course, the three pianos. Cristofori was 71 years old when his oil portrait was painted (the original was lost in the Second World War), wearing court dress and holding in his left hand a diagram of the piano action. Five years later, in 1731, he died in Florence, widely recognised as the inventor of the 'keyboard with loud and soft, made by little hammers'.

It is perhaps no accident that the birth of the piano occurred in an artistic milieu where opera was the most popular form of entertainment, for both the Medici and Florence's upper crust. But if opera was the favourite of the two musical Grand Princes, Ferdinando and Gian Gascone, their father, Grand Duke Cosimo III, was partial to oratorio. Early on, opinion held that Cristofori's new invention was best suited to the chamber, rather than part of the larger ensembles required for opera or among the even greater forces for oratorio. But as early as 1711, Scipione Maffei, who surely deserves to be called the first 'publicist of the piano', voiced his confidence in the instrument's wide expressive range, and by extension, its potential as a solo instrument. If the first solo music for the instrument would not be published until the year after Cristofori's death, his designs, techniques and ideas were piquing interest all over Europe.

Cristofori's apprentices and followers – two pianos of the 'Cristofori school' by Ferrini and del Mela exist – helped the piano take root in Italy. Further afield,

his keyboards were being emulated by builders in Portugal and Spain, while Schröter, Friederici and Silbermann were among the German builders pursuing Cristofori's ideas in the north. Only in France, where the harpsichord continued to flourish well into the third quarter of the 18th century, was the piano viewed somewhat sceptically as an odd foreign innovation. And this, despite the 1713 declaration of François Couperin le Grand, extolling the harpsichord's range and brilliance: 'but as it is impossible to swell or diminish the volume of sound, I would be forever grateful to anyone who, by infinite art sustained by taste, is able to render the instrument capable of expression'. Couperin could not have known that Cristofori had already accomplished the feat, and in doing so altered the harpsichord so significantly that the result was an entirely new instrument.

Pollens's fascinating book provides an abundance of contextual detail to the story of the piano's birth and early life. Select instruments are described in great detail, but with a lucidity that puts Cristofori's achievement and its spread within the layman's grasp. The portrayal of the texture and substance of the musical life of Cristofori's Florence is particularly impressive. One need not be a historian of invention, an organologist or even a pianist to enjoy the wealth of information gathered here by one of our most important scholar/builders. **Patrick Rucker**

From 1989

Or European Music and the Modernist Unconscious

By Seth Brodsky

University of California Press, 368pp, HB, £62.95

ISBN 978-0-520-27936-0



With refreshing, indeed swashbuckling ambition, *From 1989* seeks out the meaning of musical

modernism. It does so by analysing ‘musical modernism’s constitutive antagonisms, how it puts itself in binds again and again of its own accord’. To untangle those binds, the American musicologist Seth Brodsky uses a Lacanian toolkit, along with implements of Žižek, Adorno, Jameson, Aristotle, Foucault, Marx and seemingly every writer who’s written two words about musical modernism. The result is a difficult, maddening, at times brilliant book.

The first thing that stands out is its unusual format. Topics shift from Beethoven to David Hasselhoff to Heiner Goebbels; the stylistic register from autobiographical to psychoanalytic to music analytic; and the time period from the early 19th century to the present. If this risks confusion, it’s justified, Brodsky writes, because *From 1989* purposely ‘operates through at least a minimal identification with its main object of enquiry’. That is to say, like modernist art, Brodsky’s text is difficult by design. It’s certainly reader-unfriendly at times, but it’s also an Olympic workout for the grey matter.

The crux of Brodsky’s thesis (insofar as it can be baldly stated) is that musical modernism involves a type of Freudian fantasy, a fantasy of the self and of origins. This is the very condition that constitutes subjectivity itself. Brodsky accordingly homes in, intriguingly, on the musical genre of fantasy as a bridge between psychoanalytic theory and musical practice. Brodsky writes: ‘the transcendental, disembodied subject is not only capable of fantasy, but is a fantasy ... The subject turns to philosophy to give an ontogenetic account of its origins, now unrecoverable. At the same historical moment it turns to music – to fantasies – to stage an ontogenetic theater of origins.’ Whether or not you’ll like *From 1989* can be gauged by how you react to that piece of text.

To explore how music helps us stage historical origins, Brodsky analyses three spectacular musical events of 1989 that marked the fall of the Berlin Wall, from David Hasselhoff, Leonard Bernstein and Mstislav Rostropovich. These he treats as *Phantasiestücke*; none of them presents actual freedom but rather stages its semblance, ‘which is enough’. In a psychoanalytic way, Brodsky scrutinises these socio-cultural events as symptoms, ‘as the Freudian clinic tried to treat dreams’.

Brodsky next focuses on three modernist works from 1989 to assess musical modernism’s relation to history: Berio’s *Rendering*, Heiner Goebbels’s *Befreiung* and Paweł Szymański’s *Kaleidoscope*. These analyses are excellent and lead to a wider consideration of new music (in the course



Bartolomeo Cristofori is the focus of Stewart Pollens’s fascinating study of the early evolution of the piano

of which he makes the eyebrow-raising claim that Lachenmann is ‘positively Brahmsian’). Musical modernism, Brodsky argues, represents a ‘failure to execute a temporal revolution it is always auguring, and its correspondent “success” as a repeated turning in place, a constant coming back to where it started’. Musical modernism is recursive, perpetuating itself through its situation in history, our constitutive fantasy.

As I’ve suggested, there are moments of genius. But by the latter stages Brodsky’s thesis is so convolutedly kitchen-sink complex that the narrative teeters at the brink of incoherence. Typically for a debut author, the prose has too many references, making the argument hard to discern. A warning sign of the book’s lack of focus is its 26-page introduction, which jumps confusingly from topic to topic. ‘Show, don’t tell’ is a basic writerly principle that might have been adhered to here: better just to get on with the argument.

I have three main disagreements with *From 1989*’s approach. First, Brodsky reduces modernist art to negativity and

failure, when even in the ostensibly dark music of Lachenmann there is much of Nietzsche’s Dionysian yes-sayer. Second, *From 1989* ignores the writings of the artists themselves, passing over such perspicacious accounts of creativity as that of Paul Klee in favour of generalising theories. And third, while the book has excellent insights aplenty, they tend to get lost amid the ‘sprouting vines’ of over-abundant cultural theory. A less indulgent editor might have taken a rapier to the text.

So, if internally divided subjects, the being of the other, and Lacanian formulae like ‘\$a’ aren’t your cup of tea, you might find *From 1989* hard going. I did, though I also greatly admire its intelligence. The wide focus and continual shifts of register mean it feels like four books spliced together. I suspect Brodsky wouldn’t be unhappy with that impression. From the rubble of Schoenberg and Mahler, mortared using the wreckage of Lacan and Adorno, Brodsky constructs a fantastical theoretical cathedral – a ‘monument of its own magnificence’ (to use Yeats’s phrase) rather than a building for uncritical worship. **Liam Cagney**

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Brooklyn Raga Massive

Terry Riley *In C*

Northern Spy © NS094



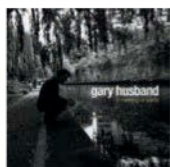
Terry Riley's landmark of minimalist composition, *In C*, has been tackled in a number of different ways since its initial unveiling in 1964. Now, from Brooklyn, comes an interpretation that nods to Riley's own later devotion to Hindustani singer Pandit Pran Nath and North Indian classical music. A brief, languidly uncoiling alap – or introductory improvisation – is followed by just over an hour of Riley's overlapping melodic cells performed largely on traditional Indian instruments. The piece is rendered fairly faithfully, revealing the genius of Riley's original conception: even in this entirely novel sound world, the eternally spooling, trance-inducing

simplicity of *In C* is utterly unmistakable. That said, there are moments throughout when the ensemble loosens just enough to let an individual instrumental personality through, as when a soaring bansuri flute emerges, imparting a mystical tinge, or a violin solo arises from the relentless cycles, conjuring some of the otherworldliness of John McLaughlin's classic of Indo-jazz *My Goal's Beyond*. **Daniel Spicer**

Gary Husband

A Meeting of Spirits

Edition © EDN1098



Few artists have been better positioned to appreciate the vision of John McLaughlin. A fan since his teen years, Husband has been McLaughlin's keys man (and second drummer!) for over a decade.

So this gorgeous evocation of McLaughlin's music, all on acoustic piano, is a real view from the inside. The oddity, however, is that this first Husband outing on Edition is actually a re-run of an album that's only had a US release. His piano work, so articulate, so spare, so straight to the heart is ridiculously rare, so any opportunity to hear Husband at the keys has got to be welcome, even on a 12-year-old release. Husband's approach, like McLaughlin's, is eclectic: he can be meditative with long glistening runs as on 'Spirits Opening', he can be rambunctious, slapping and rattling the piano's body on a broadly grinning 'Celestial Terrestrial Commuters' or downright mysterious, as on the fleeting excerpt, 'Jazz Jungle'. Most of the cuts are tight and over half the 13 songs come in under two minutes: the epic contrast though is 'Are You The One', replete with piano percussion and sampled vox. **Andy Robson**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Belem & the MeKanics

Belem & the MeKanics

Igloo Records © IGL287



Belem are a duo, consisting of diatonic accordionist Didier Laloy and cellist Kathy Adam. Laloy met Walter Hus, who provides The MeKanics – not a backing band, but an extraordinary assemblage of cables, pipes, metallic and wooden blades controlled by a computer. This creates the sounds of an unusual 15-piece orchestra. This madcap apparatus is the 21st-century descendant of the mechanical organs that, like pianolas, automatically played music from sheets of punched card. Such instruments, made by the Decap company, were very popular in the cafés of Belgium in the middle of the last century. 'Decap and Walter Hus

worked for years,' explains Laloy, 'to bring the breath of the flautist, the flexibility of the drummer and the virtuosity of the most virtuoso of Chinese musicians to mechanized instruments.' The music of Belem & The MeKanics is, as you might expect, splendidly eccentric, conjuring the fairground, the cabaret, chanson and early cinema – theatrical, enthralling, sometimes alarming, and very European. **Julian May**

Maya Youssef

Syrian Dreams

Harmonia Mundi/Latitudes © HMM902349



'This album is my personal journey through the six years of war in Syria,' Youssef writes of her debut album. 'I see the act of playing music as the opposite of death; it is a life and hope-affirming act.'

Music as a healing instrument, as a way of handling hard experiences and the harder emotions that come with them: you need real expertise to achieve these results. And Youssef, who started playing aged seven, is a virtuoso of the qanun, the traditional Syrian 78-stringed plucked zither whose pitch tunes the rest of an ensemble. She has worked with players from a wide range of backgrounds and traditions and here she teams up with musicians including cellist Barney Morse-Brown, oud player Attab Haddad and percussionist Sebastian Flaig. There is strength hidden in the delicacy of the music, a web of sympathetic parts working as one. She is a master of her instrument, one who will let it take possession of her. On extended songs such as the 11-minute 'Seven Gates of Damascus' and 'Queen of the Night', the music is sure to take possession of you, too.

Tim Cumming

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

James Jolly takes us on two listening journeys inspired by conducting fathers and sons

The Järvi three

Choosing just two recordings from a catalogue of over 500 redefines the relationship between quarts and pint pots, but I'm going to plump for Neeme Järvi's *Gramophone* Award-winning Chandos recording of **Prokofiev's** Sixth Symphony – surely the composer's greatest, of which this magnificent performance leaves you in no doubt. My other recording from him is from his pioneering cycle for BIS of symphonies by his fellow Estonian **Eduard Tubin** (1905-82). Tubin left 10 completed symphonies and I'm opting for the Tenth from 1973, a single-movement work with a wonderfully fibrous texture and a very satisfying shape and structure. Its mood is sombre and elegiac yet Tubin packs so much in and with a performance as rich (and magnificently recorded) as this, it'll soon find a special place in your affections.

Paavo is no sloth when it comes to making records and, again, choosing two is quite an ask. I'm opting for a fairly recent recording of **Bruckner's** Sixth Symphony, a modern version that shows what a superb conductor Paavo is – his control of the Frankfurt RSO (and he's a conductor who selects the repertoire for each of his orchestras with immense care) is very impressive and, what's more, he negotiates the shifts and turns of this strangely elusive work with enormous dexterity. As Paavo says in the interview on page 14, Estonian music is something he champions wherever and whenever he can, and one composer he has done an enormous service for is **Erkki-Sven Tüür**. I'm particularly drawn to an ECM recording of the Piano Concerto and Seventh Symphony. As David Fanning said of the symphony: 'This is another granite-hewn score, which seizes you by the magnificence of its soundmasses, then holds you by the logic of their mutations.'

Kristjan Järvi may lag a bit in the family discography stakes but he's made some impressive recordings. His Leipzig version of **Tchaikovsky's** complete incidental music for the play *The Snow Maiden* is a total joy and actually gives his father's Chandos recording a run for its money. Like his brother and father, Kristjan has performed a lot of **Arvo Pärt's** music and his Sony Classical collection entitled 'Cantique' is very impressive, and a nice introduction to slightly more unusual Pärt fare – linking the powerful, choral *Stabat mater* and *Cantique des dégrés* with the Third Symphony.

Conductors with famous conducting sons – prompted by this month's focus on the Järvis – leads to three pairs of top-flight maestros who recorded the same repertoire ...



Erich Kleiber left a Beethoven Fifth to rival his son's

Passing the baton

Conducting dynasties like the Järvis are fairly rare, but two conductors, rather than four, in a family aren't so unusual. Say the name 'Carlos Kleiber' to anyone with a vague interest in classical music and the response will probably be 'Beethoven's Fifth'. His is one of those recordings that doesn't yet count as historic (it was released in June 1975), yet almost immediately took on a classic status. Richard Osborne, then a tyro critic for *Gramophone*, pinned his colours to the mast: 'This is the finest Fifth we have had for at least a decade. It is a glorious achievement.' Carlos's father, Erich, one of the greatest conductors of the last century, left a number of recordings of **Beethoven's** Fifth. Best known is the 1953 Decca version with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. It is very fine: fiery, high-tension and precise; and I suspect the

clarity and range of Decca's recordings allows us to hear it pretty well as intended. If you've an hour or so, try the two side by side – quite a legacy from one family!

Mariss Jansons has achieved greater renown than his father, Arvids, an important figure in Leningrad musical life. While Mariss's discography is extensive, Arvids's representation is slight, but they do cross over in a couple of major works, Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and **Mozart's** Requiem. Arvids recorded the Mozart with, uniquely, all four soloists from the same family, the renowned baritone Pavel Lisitsian, his daughters Rusanna and Karina and son Ruben. The performance is very well prepared and, in the old style, highly impressive (the 'Lacrymosa', taken very slowly, really works). Mariss Jansons has never been particularly bothered about historically informed practice and his Amsterdam recording takes its place among the more traditional interpretations. It's superbly done – with beautiful playing from the great Dutch orchestra, magnificent choral singing from the Netherlands Radio Choir and four terrific soloists.

Armin and Philippe Jordan, both very much at home in the opera house, have not recorded much in common but given their pedigrees in **Wagner** (father Armin led some acclaimed Seattle Opera performances, while Philippe has a few *Ring* cycles under his belt and is limbering up for one at the Met next season), why not compare son, in orchestral excerpts from *The Ring*, with father in *Parsifal*?

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 Mikkola pf Frankfurt RSO / P Järvi ECM New Series
Tchaikovsky The Snow Maiden
 MDR Leipzig RSO / K Järvi Sony Classical
Pärt 'Cantique' RIAS Chbr Ch; Berlin RSO / K Järvi
 Sony Classical

Beethoven Symphony No 5 BPO / C Kleiber DG
Beethoven Symphony No 5 Concertgebouw /
 E Kleiber Decca
Mozart Requiem Sols; chor; Latvian RTV SO /
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Young Slava

A glorious celebration of the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich in everything from Beethoven trios to modern concertos

Not too long ago, my (now) 98-year-old uncle, the one-time *Daily Mirror* film critic Donald Zec, drew a cartoon of a celebrated scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Says Hamlet, famously, 'Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio ...'. Replied Yorick (according to Donald), 'You didn't know me that well!' The reason I mention this quip is that in Melodiya's 'Young Slava' the venerable cellist isn't actually that young. The majority of these live recordings are from the mid-1960s, by which time Slava was in his late thirties. His recording career had started quite a few years earlier, most notably including the Dvořák Concerto under Václav Talich (1952). It's good, though, that the version of this classic in the new set is the one from 1963 under Boris Khaikin, which tops its predecessor not only in terms of the recording – the stereo sound is exceptionally good – but also in the sheer expressive range of Rostropovich's playing, the way he edges from one passage to the next, slowing the tempo ever so slightly and dipping his tone to the merest whisper. Khaikin, too, offers a compellingly dramatic account of the orchestral score. That lacerating attack is much in evidence and the combination of elegance, virtuosity and a beguiling warmth of tone are equally apparent on the 1964 Tchaikovsky coupling (*Pezzo capriccioso* and *Rococo Variations* under Rozhdestvensky and Svetlanov respectively).

Melodiya offers a sturdy, smartly designed black-and-white box with no notes, and although some of the material has been out before – often in mono rather than in stereo, as here – there are some recordings that were new to me: Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto under David Oistrakh (1965), for example, which is exceptional even by the standards of various other Slava versions of the piece, Oistrakh's conducting white hot with thundering thwacks from the timpani.

Think in terms of the sort of cinematic sound Mercury obtained on its Russian sessions and you'll know roughly what to expect. The Shostakovich is coupled with Weinberg's C minor Concerto (from 1964 with Rozhdestvensky conducting), a heart-rending piece audibly redolent of the composer's Jewish roots, the performance infused with genuine feeling.

The 'bonus' disc is the Moscow world premiere of Britten's *Cello Symphony* (March 12, 1964) with the composer himself conducting, one of those rare cases where 'first played is best played', or, at the very least, it's a close runner-up to Britten's Decca recordings of the piece. Miaskovsky's Cello Concerto always glowed in Rostropovich's hands though surely never more so than under Svetlanov in 1964. On the same disc is Khachaturian's appealing *Concerto-Rhapsody* (same conductor, same period) and a mono (1959) recording of the 'Aria' from Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas brasileiras* No 5 with Rostropovich's wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, aided by an ensemble of cellos led by her husband – the singing effective if rather more operatic than we're used to in this piece; the solo cello playing magical.

A disc of music by Lev Knipper (*Concerto Monologue* for cello, brass and timpani), Vladimir Vlasov (*Improvisation*), Yuri Levitin (*Concertino*) and Boris Tchaikovsky – all recorded in 1964 – is dominated, qualitatively speaking, by the latter work, though the Knipper inhabits a fairly unusual sound world.

My own favourite CD in the set couples Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* under Kyrill Kondrashin with Bloch's *Schelomo* where Yuri Ahronovitch is at the helm. Kondrashin's Moscow Philharmonic is alert to every nerve-end in Strauss's entrancing score, whether 'riding through the air' or sustaining the almost unbearable tenderness of 'The Death of Don

Quixote'. As with the Dvořák Concerto, Rostropovich plays as if his life depends on it, the intensity, the range of expression, the rapport with Kondrashin and his fellow soloists (violinist Boris Simsky and viola player Dmitri Shebalin), his intuitive grasp of the music's language, all are remarkable. *Schelomo* turns on the heat almost as much as Feuermann did for Stokowski 25 or so years earlier, while Rostropovich alternates contemplation and rage more demonstrably than he did under Bernstein some years later (for EMI, now Warner Classics).

Among the rarities are performances, from 1964, under Victor Dubrovsky of Lalo's Concerto and Saint-Saëns's First Concerto, the former full of vim and vigour if just occasionally fallible, the latter brilliant in the extreme. And if you want to sample Rostropovich's tone at its most beguiling, try Respighi's *Adagio con variazioni* under Rozhdestvensky, easily as appealing as André Navarra's beautiful Supraphon recording, and more pitch-perfect.

The only all-mono (studio recorded) programmes are devoted to chamber music, all four works recorded in 1958. Beethoven's String Trios Op 9 Nos 1 and 3 with Leonid Kogan and Rudolf Barshai, are also available in live performances from Prague (Supraphon, with the Op 3 Trio). At first glance I assumed that the repeat in Op 9 No 1's first movement had been omitted in Prague (where the timing is 9'05" as opposed to the earlier version's 13'49"). Not a bit of it. It's all down to drive and faster tempos, which keeps the Prague performance very much alive and kicking. The Russian take on Op 9 No 3 is sensitively crafted but again the Prague version ups the energy level bringing both Czech performances on a par with the classic Heifetz-Primrose-Piatigorsky recordings (RCA). Lastly Fauré's First Quartet and Brahms's First Piano Trio, both with Kogan and Emil



Mstislav Rostropovich: a magnificent set featuring the not-so-young Slava in a huge range of music

Gilels (and Rudolf Barshai in the Fauré), focused performances both of them and superbly executed.

I can't think of another Rostropovich collection that offers quite such a comprehensive showcase of this great cellist's art and although live recordings inevitably have their drawbacks, such is the level of musicianship that you soon forget about the odd cough or round of appreciative applause. A magnificent set.

RECORDING



'Young Slava'
Mstislav Rostropovich et al
Melodiya (F) (C)
MELCD100 2505

Miraculous Tchaikovsky from Mengelberg

I mentioned in the context of reviewing Karajan's live Philharmonia Tchaikovsky Fourth (see page 44) 'a rhetorical pause just before the final onslaught' in the first movement, referring in passing to Willem Mengelberg's 1929 Concertgebouw version, which takes the same dramatic interpretative option. Pristine's two-CD set of Mengelberg's complete Columbia Tchaikovsky recordings reminds me of words I read in these pages back in May 1965, when the critic Trevor Harvey recalled listening to Mengelberg's version of the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture in the company of Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten. 'Mengelberg's performance, even with those breaks that 78 records

entail, seemed absolutely marvellous – and I still believe it was.' Those words embossed Mengelberg's name onto my brain and I was soon popping down to Gramex in London's Wardour Street to search out as many of his 78s as I could lay my hands on. True to TH's claims, Mengelberg's Tchaikovsky – and not only *Romeo and Juliet*, but the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, the *Serenade for Strings* 'Waltz' and, much later on, rare earlier versions of the Fifth Symphony's middle movements – changed for ever the way I heard this marvellous music. Harold Schoenberg once described Mengelberg as 'the Horowitz of the orchestra', an apt phrase given the special alchemy that Mengelberg achieved, with infinitely flexible phrasing, superb playing, whether in the fiercely drilled *allegros* or the poetic solos, and an abundance of imagination. Yes, there are cuts in the Fifth's finale and 'changements' (as Mengelberg was wont to call them) elsewhere, but to call these performances charismatic is to understate their effect. The recordings are in the main superb for their period and Pristine's transfers (the work of Mark Obert-Thorn) are surely the best we've had so far. So my advice is don't hesitate: buy without delay because music-making of this calibre appears but once in a lifetime, maybe not ours in this case – but thank heavens we have access to it.

THE RECORDING



'Mengelberg conducts Tchaikovsky: the complete Columbia recordings 1927-30'
Pristine Audio (B) (2) PASC511

Koussevitsky's nephew

No one could claim that Fabien Sevitzy (1893-1967), Serge Koussevitsky's nephew, was in the Mengelberg class, or indeed in his uncle's league. But he was a very good conductor none the less. Sevitzy became Music Director of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1937 after he first conducted it in the winter of the previous year and remained at the orchestra's helm until 1955, when he moved to Miami.

The second volume in Pristine's Indianapolis/Sevitzy series (the first on PASC479 featured a fine account of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony) includes two undoubted highlights, the first of which, Alexander Glazunov's suite *From the Middle Ages*, is a world-premiere recording (and the only version of the work to be released on 78s). Sevitzy's performance is at its best in the two middle movements, the feisty 'Scherzo' (which is especially well recorded) and the richly scored and achingly beautiful 'Serenade of the Troubadour', both movements also recorded by the RAI Orchestra, Turin under Victor de Sabata (now out on Naxos). It would be some while before Nikolai Golovanov would make his benchmark LP of the whole work for Melodiya, and years after that before Yevgeny Svetlanov, a Golovanov admirer whose approach was in certain respects not dissimilar, taped his excellent stereo version.

The other highlight on this Sevitzy CD is the Gershwin/Robert Russell Bennett *Porgy and Bess* Symphonic Picture with one oddity, a bassoon going proxy for the banjo in 'I got plenty o' nuttin''. Still, the performance is both lush and appropriately big screen, with keen orchestral attack and some very expressive string playing. Also included are two works by the Russian-American composer and arranger Arcady Dubensky (*Stephen Foster: Theme, Variations and Finale* and a *Fugue for 18 violins*) and Otto Cesana, the rather unfortunately titled *Negro Heaven* (originally a piano roll), a pleasant enough listen which would surely need to be re-named if a revival were to be on the cards. Again the playing is excellent, and so are the transfers.

THE RECORDING



'Fabien Sevitzy: Indianapolis Symphony, Vol 2'
Works by Glazunov, Dubensky, Cesana, Gershwin/Bennett
Pristine Audio (B) (2) PASC509

Classics RECONSIDERED



David Gutman and **Andrew Mellor** spar over the pros and cons of Bernstein's recording of Sibelius's Fifth with the New York Philharmonic



Sibelius

Symphony No 5

New York Philharmonic / Leonard Bernstein
CBS/Sony Classical

Given a crack orchestra, it would be difficult for any conductor to fail to make a rousing success of the scherzo and finale of this symphony; these movements are played brilliantly by Bernstein and his New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

I should have thought it difficult not to make a success of the 'slow' movement (for it isn't really slow, since it is marked *andante mosso, quasi allegretto*), but Bernstein plays it so slowly that it is plain dull. But the real test is the preludial

opening movement and in this Bernstein is simply not comparable with Karajan. Karajan's crescendos, for one thing, are tremendous, while he also seizes every chance of moments of fire and grandeur; Bernstein makes very little of it indeed. As I listened, I thought it pretty boring music and began to wonder how I had ever enjoyed it; but when I put on Karajan the answer was clear.

Bernstein seems much happier with *Pohjola's Daughter*, which gets a good performance indeed – but any customer is obviously going to buy the record for the symphony in the first place and in this Karajan is definitely the finer. I was

reviewing in the company of a friend who much dislikes Sibelius. He listened to a bit of Bernstein's record from the start and then returned to his book, only remarking at the end that what he had heard confirmed his dislike of the symphony. I then played Karajan and I noticed that the book was put down – and he remarked that 'the work isn't as awful as I thought'!

I have referred to Karajan, but if I were going to buy a record of this symphony, I am not sure I wouldn't save a good deal of money and go for Gibson, who gives a really excellent and well recorded performance, with the London Symphony Orchestra in fine form. **Trevor Harvey (2/66)**

David Gutman Only Herbert von Karajan and Sir Neville Marriner amassed the kind of copious and varied catalogue associated with Leonard Bernstein in the 1960s.

Whatever your take on the iffy critical response Bernstein sometimes triggered over here, his Sibelius did sound particularly harsh on LP. This, the first and most boisterous of his Fifts (there are three in the lists), was made in 1961 and went unissued in the UK until 1966. In the meantime, we'd had Karajan being marmoreal on DG, sonically streets ahead. Then again, Bernstein's recordings aren't impersonal, would-be definitive statements. They bristle with life, an aspect curiously absent from Trevor Harvey's listening notes but not, I think, from the music-making.

Andrew Mellor Listening to this brings an actual image of Bernstein conducting to mind. That lies at the heart of what I both like and recoil from in the performance. You have to get used to the idea that what sounds like nature music in

most decent performances – the various figurations that freewheel and lock into each other with apparent inevitability – here sounds more like factory music.

An extreme example would be the string motifs at around 4'44" in the first movement. They have clearly been shaped and shrink-wrapped in the rehearsal room; there is no way they were thrown up by the musical conversation, organically. Do you hear what I'm getting at?

DG I do, and I can sense that generational divide in expectations. Not having grown up with the cooler more expository Sibelius of Osmo Vänskä and with no knowledge that the piece began life as a sort of modernist extension of the Fourth, we expected a more effortful and interventionist approach, not necessarily a 'romantic' one. If you don't like the way the strings dig in at that point, what do you make of his choices elsewhere in the first movement, not least the raw, blazing coda? You can at least hear the *fff* timpani entries which others mix down. Perhaps my fondness for Karajan and

Bernstein is as irrational as TH's for Alexander Gibson! I see that the musicologist James Hepokoski has praised their shared "phenomenological" contemplation of Klang' – whatever that means. They did get slower and more contemplative over the years, though Bernstein had (mostly) yet to embark on that journey at the time of this recording.

AM I think the coda is pure pantomime, but wouldn't expect less from Bernstein, and in a sense the music can take it.

DG The New York Philharmonic archives include Bernstein's annotated score in which one can see that he has scrawled 'Avanti' where he wants to remind himself to ramp up the tempo (as elsewhere 'cantando' when he wants melodic lines to sing). Does that make the coda a stunt?

AM For me, the problem isn't lack of reserve or overheating, it's simply the technical handling of the motifs. TH doesn't like the slow speed in the central movement – but



Leonard Bernstein: does the conductor make 'nature music' sound like 'factory music'?

why? I would suggest it's because, again, Bernstein isn't standing back and letting the river flow; he's choreographing – and choreographing interlocking motifs that need to find their own equilibrium naturally, musically. This is the lesson any Sibelius conductor or player needs to learn, and it hasn't been here. Isn't this one difference between Mahler and Sibelius – that Mahler needs to be machined or powered, whereas Sibelius needs to be blown or carried?

DG Well, I don't see the point of writing a theme and variations in which continuity is prized over contrast. I know it's always been fashionable to think of Sibelius in terms of organic growth, but he was also a master of movement, colour and even charm (belying the stern image partly invented by his wife and her nationalist chums). I'll admit there's nothing *poco* about the *poco largamente* towards the end of the movement; and that outrageous final *ritardando* was imposed by all the old-school conductors, Karajan apart. Otherwise, I can't see that Bernstein lacks authorisation for what he does. He brings out allusions to Viennese classicism in the delicate hustle and bustle and makes the Brahmsian woodwind writing more Brahmsian as well as 'indulging' the romantic element. The playing is anything but dull. My guess is that the dynamic range would have been severely compressed on TH's original LP.

AM You've avoided my larger point about the style!

DG Bernstein was the first Western conductor to record all seven Sibelius symphonies in stereo (the Japanese having got there first) and I'm not sure how well the New York Philharmonic will have known the less familiar works, if at all. But the point you make applies to all his music-making to some degree. According to producer John McClure, 'With Bernstein, we would listen to playbacks and then we'd definitely have to make changes ... He was always trying to highlight stuff to make sure no one missed the point of this solo or that solo – sometimes to the detriment of the overall perspective.'

AM I agree entirely; this seems to be Bernstein's *modus operandi*, and your quote underlines why his performances often sound fissile – he clarifies the moving parts so they bounce off each other. Great for Mahler and Nielsen. Dangerous (not in a good way) in Sibelius. But I'll concede that where it does work wonderfully is in the final pages, as the theme fights and twists its way through, against, the contrary voices and harmonies. But how do *you* – as a critic who, I think, appreciates the long structural game – react? Can we really revel in this final struggle if it hasn't been adequately prepared?

DG *Gramophone's* long-serving Sibelius expert Robert Layton regarded this Fifth as 'one of the finest of its day' (3/90), and even TH notices that it's 'played brilliantly'. That said, I know many people hear Bernstein's work your way. Can we at least agree that at this stage of his career there's no case for confusing those enthusiastic, didactic impulses with self-regard? The 'competing' lower layers of Sibelian texture were given greater prominence in his DG remake, perhaps to point up how the composer's hard-won processes create, in Robert Simpson's terminology, 'a vast slow motion of their own, like that of the sky as the earth rotates, while upon the planet's surface there is teeming human and animal movement'. But, oh dear, it's almost always painfully slow. Give me the sheer physical excitement as generated in 1961 – the finale at least represents Bernstein at his best.

AM What a beautiful quote from Simpson. He makes the point that you allude to, which is that the tempo in any Sibelius symphony from the Third onwards is arguably a single one, a single idea; you don't stitch the sections to each other, you create a gravitational speed from which all the adopted tempos stem. Agreed, Bernstein isn't being self-regarding; I love his honesty and his gregariousness with this music. But he hasn't mastered that concept, whereas others – before him, even – did. So either way, it *is* his personality.

DG Bernstein may not possess the mastery of transition that allowed Karajan to give the impression of a gradual and seamless increase in tempo all the way through the second (scherzo) phase of the first movement, but if you really want to time travel, don't forget Robert Kajanus and the LSO in 1932. Sibelius's drinking partner would seem to exemplify a spontaneous performing style more flexible, erratic and human than Bernstein would ever have countenanced. The first movement ends with a similarly precipitate, but here chaotic, sprint. Authenticity, like 'classic' status, is not fixed.

AM Ha ha, yes – you can take the boy out of Manhattan, but ... Of course authenticity isn't fixed or ring-fenced, but it's funny how conductors from the north, from Kajanus to Berglund to Okko Kamu to Vänskä to John Storgårds, make their own freneticism feel more natural and somehow slower.

DG Well, here's one Vänskä fan who won't be dumping his Bernstein! **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Works inspired by popular music

He could have gone back much further in time, but **Paul Kilbey** decided to stay firmly in the 20th and 21st centuries with 10 composers who've taken something specific from popular music and made it their own

Yes, true. This selection could have started a good century or two earlier – the quodlibet in the *Goldberg Variations*, the Turkish march in the *Choral Symphony*. Or it could have included the entire output of more than a handful of major figures, from Gershwin to Bernstein to Weill. Johann Strauss II? Mozart? Verdi? The list goes on. Classical and popular music have danced (a waltz? a tango?) hand in hand through history.

But for the last century they have seemed often to be dancing to different tunes, as their audiences have drifted apart. Yet there remains a surprising amount of common ground, and not only when

popular artists sample Bach, experiment with electronics or hire an orchestra. Classical composers are not as isolated from popular music as some believe. Some have striven to bring the styles closer together, whether writing classical works in a deliberately more accessible language, or creating popular works with a classicist's touch – or, if you're Bernstein, both. And others have looked at pop music and found something specific in it – whether a song, a soloist, a style or an instrument – that they haven't been able to resist making their own.

Here are 10 examples from that category: works in which composers borrow

shamelessly from popular music and jazz, yet create something unarguably classical from it. They include quotations, transcriptions, reimaginings and even completely original works that adopt popular mannerisms or styles.

What about the many figures who have feet in both popular and classical camps – the likes of Jonny Greenwood, Bryce Dessner or Anna Meredith? They are sufficiently numerous and varied to need a whole list of their own, although they further prove the same point: somewhere in the corner of the room, classical music and pop are still dancing together, and they can't take their eyes off each other. **G**



A sincere homage to a style and artist close to his heart: Mark-Anthony Turnage with jazz guitarist John Scofield

PHOTOGRAPHY: HR/URBAN KIRCHBERG



Turnage **Scorched**

John Scofield *elec gtr et al*;
Frankfurt RSO / Hugh Wolff
DG (2/04)

Long before he quoted Beyoncé in *Hammered Out* (2009-10), Mark-Anthony Turnage collaborated with jazz guitarist John Scofield. Scofield played in *Blood on the Floor* (1993-96) for orchestra and jazz soloists; and in *Scorched* (1996-2001) Turnage freely orchestrated improvisations by Scofield, who played alongside in a trio. It's an example of Gunther Schuller's 'third stream', but mainly it sounds like Turnage's sincere homage to a style (and an artist) close to his heart. This is a live recording.



Glass **'Low' Symphony**

Brooklyn Philharmonic Orch /
Dennis Russell Davies
Decca (5/93)

Philip Glass's First Symphony (1992) is based on three David Bowie songs on the 'Low' album. It's a sinister selection, and Glass expands thoughtfully on the ominous air. The outer movements ('Subterraneans' and 'Warszawa') stay faithful to the songs before developing them classically, while the middle movement ('Some Are') is freer - 'Brucknerian', Glass said. The Brooklyn PO commissioned it, and this album pairs it with Glass's other Bowie symphony, *Heroes*.



Stravinsky **Ragtime**

Toni Koves *cimb* Columbia
Chbr Ens / Igor Stravinsky
Sony (12/62)

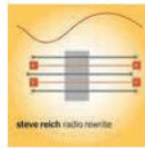
Ragtime (1917-18) for 11 instruments is a standard-bearer for off-kilter, tongue-in-cheek tributes to popular music. A panoply of light-hearted, syncopated fragments are refracted in typical Stravinskian style, resulting in a bizarrely instrumented, unpredictable work that has both everything and nothing to do with ragtime. The cimbalom, though hardly a standard jazz instrument, features prominently. This recording is an insouciant marvel that's hard to beat.



arr Bryars et al **Mercy and Grand**

Various artists
GB Records
Gavin Bryars's classic minimalist

work *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971) was re-released in 1993 featuring Tom Waits. More than a decade later, Bryars returned to Waits's music without the man himself. His project *Mercy and Grand* is a concert-length set of Waits songs and assorted other numbers, arranged for an ensemble put together by (and featuring) Bryars, with mezzo-soprano Jess Walker wisely opting not to do a direct imitation of Waits's gravelly tones. This live recording was made in Leeds, 2008.



Reich **Radio Rewrite**

Alarm Will Sound /
Alan Pierson
Nonesuch (12/14)

Impressed after hearing Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood perform his *Electric Counterpoint*, Steve Reich delved into the band's back catalogue and decided to use two songs - 'Everything in Its Right Place' and 'Jigsaw Falling into Place' - as the basis for *Radio Rewrite* (2012). Radiohead drift in and out of focus in a work of typically Reichian rhythmic propulsion and harmonic ambiguity. Greenwood's take on *Electric Counterpoint* also features on this album.



Adès **Cardiac Arrest**

Composers Ensemble
Warner (5/04)
The enterprising Composers

Ensemble performed several artful pop transcriptions in the mid-1990s, initially at the behest of Elvis Costello when he curated the 1995 Meltdown festival in London. Philip Cashian did Peter Gabriel, Simon Bainbridge did the Beach Boys. Few are recorded, but Thomas Adès's take on a Madness song about a stressed businessman is a hoot. Although Adès apparently did it from memory, it's fairly accurate, right down to the piano's cluster chords.



Lizée **This Will Not Be Televised**

Paolo Kapunan *turntables*
Winnipeg SO Chamber Ens /
Rei Hotoda

Centrediscs
Turntables have found their way into many composers' scores, including those by Gabriel Prokofiev and Mason Bates. Canadian composer Nicole Lizée is more experimentally inclined than either of them, and uses this instrument so redolent of nightclub music in dreamlike sonic landscapes in which mysterious memories of pop music drift in and out of focus. This eerie title-track (2005-07) is one of several to use turntables.



Arnold **Clarinet Concerto No 2**

Martin Fröst *cl*
Malmö SO / Lan Shui
BIS (A/98)

When Benny Goodman called Malcolm Arnold to commission a concerto, Arnold assumed it was a prank and told him to 'sod off'. Differences eventually were resolved, and he proved the perfect composer. First performed in 1974, the concerto has a slow movement that is both light as air and devastatingly sad, and a scandalously silly ragtime finale ('Pre-Goodman Rag'). Ideal soloist Martin Fröst also plays two more Goodman commissions, by Copland and Hindemith.



Romitelli **An Index of Metals**

Donatienne Michel-Dansac *voc*
Ictus / Georges-Élie Octors
Cypres (7/06)

His final work before his death in 2003, Fausto Romitelli's *An Index of Metals* opens with a halting Pink Floyd sample. The ensemble features guitar, electric bass, a sampler and standard acoustic instruments, as well as a vocalist. Deeply involved with rock culture, this dark work is a conceptually complex video opera that proves, if proof were needed, that engaging with popular styles doesn't mean abandoning difficult, complex themes.



Zimmermann

Trumpet Concerto 'Nobody Knows de Trouble I See' Alison Balsom *tp* BBC SSO / Lawrence Renes
Warner (2/12)

Bernd Alois Zimmermann's beloved jazz combines perfectly with 12-note technique in his 1954 Trumpet Concerto. Jazz elements - a trombone slide, even a Hammond organ - haunt this moving 15-minute work, which is based around the familiar spiritual, stated powerfully at its climax. Yet Zimmermann's complex orchestral writing easily accommodates

its diverse elements. Both serialism and jazz suffered under the Nazis, but in this concerto, scarred by the war like so much of Zimmermann's music, the coming together of these two styles is graceful and poignant. Of the several fine recordings, Alison Balsom's is enhanced by also including a chamber arrangement of the spiritual.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*

From a composer often compared with Puccini in terms of melodic gift, this opera nevertheless packs a punch in other respects and, amid a patchy discography, **Hugo Shirley** discovers quite a few treasures

Premiered at La Scala, Milan, on March 28, 1896, *Andrea Chénier* was a hit that Umberto Giordano, who lived for another half century, would never repeat. Despite the modest success of *Fedora* (1898), now most often wheeled out as a vehicle for divas in the twilight of their careers, he essentially joined those famous other *verismo* one-hit wonders, Mascagni and Leoncavallo.

In many ways, though, *Andrea Chénier* is a work closer to Puccini. Its libretto is by Puccini's great collaborator Luigi Illica, who was already working on *Tosca* while completing *Chénier*. Both librettos were originally destined for the composer Alberto Franchetti, and *Chénier* indeed shares similarities with *Tosca*, not least in placing a passionate central love triangle against a historical backdrop. Drawing liberally from elements of the story of the real-life poet André Chénier, executed in 1794, Illica's skilful libretto certainly squeezes plenty of colour and character from the period, and Giordano responds by alternating bustling crowd scenes with big-hearted lyricism.

The standard complaint dies hard: that Giordano doesn't have Puccini's melodic gift. Very few do, though, and there's no denying the skill with which Giordano could put together a score. *Andrea Chénier* crams a lot of drama and melody into less than two hours of music, offering some great opportunities for its large cast. We jump almost straight in as the servant Gérard rails against the injustices of the *ancien régime*, while his 'Nemico della patria' in Act 3 is another gift, helping to complete the picture of this complex Scarpia with a heart. Chénier himself has

plenty of big moments beyond his two main arias, the Act 1 *Improvviso* and 'Come un bel dì di maggio' in Act 4 – the latter loosely based on a poem by his real-life counterpart.

Maddalena (soprano), who should make the transition from pampered aristocrat to hardened survivor, joins her tenor (Chénier) for a big love scene in Act 2 as well as for 'Vicino a te s'acqueta', the final duet in which they steel themselves to face the guillotine together: 'La nostra morte', they sing with ever mounting intensity, 'è il trionfo dell'amor!' It's Maddalena's 'La mamma morta', however, that is arguably the best-known excerpt of this tenor-centric work, an irony that is compounded by the fact that its best-known recording – used famously in the soundtrack for *Philadelphia* (1993) – was taken from a 1954 Maria Callas recital album. Callas sang the role in the theatre only a handful of times the following year, then never returned to it.

Andrea Chénier offers some great smaller roles, too: Bersi, Maddalena's self-sacrificing maid, has a rousing solo at the start of Act 2, and the moment the old Madelon offers up her grandson to fight for *la patrie* is calculated to tug at the heart-strings. Various smaller male roles – from dandyish attendees at the Contessa's salon to scheming spies and traitors – also need to be cast from depth if sagging tension is to be avoided. Any conductor tackling the work, meanwhile, needs to be able to highlight the score's sophistication as well as whip up the moments of passion, all the while remembering that the work should also offer the opportunity for a good old-fashioned vocal feast.



'The Heroic Courage of the Young Désilles' by Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier (1738-1826), depicting the military mutiny in Nancy in the summer of 1790 during the French Revolution

EARLY EFFORTS

Andrea Chénier's discography in many ways reflects its position in the repertory: a vehicle primarily for the stars on stage, and the tenor first and foremost.

It's probably no coincidence, either, that it took until 1976 for a studio recording to hail from somewhere other than Italy. The first three recordings, indeed, come from the very house that premiered the opera, La Scala, Milan, beginning with a version recorded as far back as 1920 for the Italian HMV label La Voce del Padrone – a version (somewhat abridged under the Italian conductor



PHOTOGRAPHY: FINE ART IMAGES/HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Carlo Sabajno) that seems never to have been reissued.

The first complete recording dates from 1931, and scrubs up remarkably well in Ward Marston's Naxos remastering. Carlo Galeffi conveys vivid anguish in Gérard's opening address, there's a moving, intense quality to Lina Bruna-Rasa's 'La mamma morta', and Luigi Marini's Chénier really sounds like a poet and a thinker. But none of the voices, at least as captured here, is world-beating, and **Lorenzo Molajoli** manages nothing much more than a businesslike traversal of the score.

By contrast, the next set is headed by Beniamino Gigli's superbly burnished and ardent Chénier. The young Gino Bechi makes an immediate impression as Gérard, too – a voice, in its magnificent prime, which conveys just the right mixture of menace and dark charisma. Maria Caniglia's Maddalena oozes character and conveys powerfully a sense of vulnerability and determination. **Oliviero De Fabritiis** conducts fluently, although the orchestral playing is a bit scratchy in sound that can't help but show its considerable age.

The early 1950s also saw a further couple of Italian recordings that merit only

a quick mention. The first to be released on LP (since reissued on Preiser and available as a download) is from 1952, with Alberto Paoletti conducting an unexceptional cast and the Rome Opera forces (2/55). The next one, from 1953 (excerpts available to download from BnF Collection), is on a similar level, but with one exception: the magnificent, refulgent Maddalena of the young Renata Tebaldi. I should also say that I enjoy José Soler's poetic Chénier here; but this RAI recording under Arturo Basile, briefly reissued on Warner Fonit in the 2000s, is all about the Maddalena.



An imaginative production at the 2011 Bregenz Festival with staging by Keith Warner and a breathtaking set conceived on an epic scale by David Fielding

THE BIG GUNS

The next two studio recordings, taking us into the stereo era, capture two of the title-role's most prolific post-war exponents on lusty, unstoppable form. The first also features Tebaldi who, just four years after the RAI recording, offers an interpretation that is less sympathetic and somewhat stiffer but still mightily impressive. In 1957, her regular Decca partner Mario Del Monaco makes a terrific sound opposite her as Chénier, with his characteristic trumpety tone at its trumpetiest. Both he and Tebaldi offer some moments of tenderness, but they are few and far between, and while Ettore Bastianini certainly doesn't let the side down in terms of decibels as Gérard (this is a magnificent voice, of course, generously applied), he offers little of the role's complex, conflicted character. Listen out, too, for Fiorenza Cossotto, luxuriously cast as Bersi. **Gianandrea Gavazzeni's** conducting of the Orchestra of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome is workaday but effective, and Decca's sound holds up well, albeit

with the slight reedy brittleness we're used to from the label's Italian recordings of the period.

We stay in the Italian capital but cross to Rome Opera for EMI's 1963 set, well recorded but ploddingly conducted by **Gabriele Santini**. If Del Monaco is matched by his colleagues for Gavazzeni, here Franco Corelli is the undoubted star. The quality of his voice – big, thrillingly free and ringing – would guarantee that fact by itself, but he also helps by turning up the histrionics and listen-to-me mannerisms to a level that approaches self-parody. It's difficult to resist Corelli's Chénier for long, though, and this is a uniquely memorable assumption of the role. But it's a shame that the seams were showing at this point in Antonietta Stella's soprano: her Maddalena is patchy and often unsure of intonation. Mario Sereni, as Gérard, offers an appealing, grainy baritone and not much else.

Arguably, both Corelli and Del Monaco are best heard on live recordings in a period when *Andrea Chénier* was

enjoying considerable popularity in the theatre – when big operatic beasts bestrode the biggest stages, and Giordano's work gave them plenty to chew on. One can only regret the fact that several magnificent portrayals come down to us only as variably recorded live relays – Richard Tucker's powerful, impeccably schooled and eloquent Chénier and Leonard Warren's authoritative Gérard, for example, which can be heard on several Met recordings. We must lament the fact, too, that Carlo Bergonzi never tackled the role in the studio – his 1972 Genoa recording, conducted by **Paolo Peloso**, seems to be the only recording currently available of him in the role, with the 1970 concert performance from London (under Anton Guadagno) out of the catalogue (Myto; there's an excerpt featuring him and Angeles Gulin as Maddalena available on YouTube).

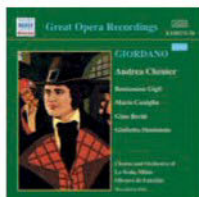
What we lack from the studio should be balanced by the fact that *Andrea Chénier* is a work that lives for the theatre and thrives on audience participation; as John Steane

HISTORIC CHOICE

La Scala, Milan / Oliviero De Fabritiis

Naxos mono © ② 8 110275/6

Listen through the hiss and there's an unmistakable authenticity to this classic set



hailing from La Scala, the site of *Andrea Chénier's* 1896 premiere. Gigli sings gloriously and is matched by Bechi's ideal Gérard and Caniglia's moving Maddalena.

LIVE CHOICE

Vienna State Opera / Lovro von Matačić

Orfeo © ② C682 062!

There's nothing like a red-blooded *Andrea Chénier* in the theatre, and there are plenty of wonderful records of thrilling nights on stage. This set has three of the great post-war voices in remarkably good sound, with excellent orchestral support.



DVD CHOICE

Royal Opera / Antonio Pappano

Warner Classics © DVD 9029 59379-6

Don't overlook the two excellent 1980s



Domingo films, but they ultimately cede their position as top choice to this intelligent, faithful and fierily conducted production starring Kaufmann and Westbrook, with state-of-the-art picture and sound quality.

commented in these pages a decade ago, 'The audience are part of this opera, almost as surely as the crowd are part of the Revolution' (3/07). Certainly, there's an undeniable thrill in the 1960 Met performance under **Fausto Cleva** with Tebaldi and Tucker, where the crowd in the auditorium erupts as soon as Maddalena and Chénier come off their final note – to hell with the orchestra's postlude! That recording is definitely worth seeking out, as is, from a more unexpected source, a fresh-sounding 1956 Munich performance, instilled with Wagnerian grandeur not only by the young **Wolfgang Sawallisch** and the terrific playing of the orchestra, but also because it's sung in German – and thrillingly so – by Marianne Schech, Hans Hopf and Josef Metternich.

Back in the opera's heartland we come to a legendary 1955 performance at La Scala, conducted by **Antonino Votto** and surrounded by rumour. Del Monaco and Callas had originally been booked to perform *Il trovatore*, but the tenor requested the change to Giordano's work, leaving many to infer that he wanted to ensure he'd be the centre of attention and perhaps even hoping that Callas, who risked stealing the show, would not have time to learn Maddalena. She did, of course, even if she never sang the role again after that run. And there is little sign of rivalry in a performance that finds Del Monaco on unusually poetic form, if occasionally a little short-breathed. Callas's performance, too, is all one would expect, full of detail and drama and heartbreakingly sung, even through sound that can be a trial – her 'La mamma morta', in particular, is marred by distortion.

So, too, to a lesser extent, is that same aria on one of the finest live recordings by Callas's great rival, Tebaldi. Otherwise, however, the 1960 Vienna performance – beautifully conducted by **Lovro von Matačić** – sounds remarkably good in Orfeo's definitive reissue. Both Tebaldi and her Chénier, a Corelli on rafter-rattling form, rise to the challenge of the theatre – which brings more out of them than the comfort of the studio. It does with Bastianini, too, who offers a far more complete picture of Gérard here than for Decca. The performance gains a great deal from being in Vienna, not just in terms of the stylish, loving playing of the orchestra, but also in an ensemble that is able to field the veteran Wagnerian Hilde Konetzni as a profoundly moving Madelon.

THREE TENORS; THREE PRETENDERS

It should come as no surprise that three of the highest-profile studio versions of the opera should each feature one of the Three Tenors. It's not surprising, either, that it



Hard to resist: Corelli's 'thrillingly free' Chénier

should have been Plácido Domingo, a year after he first tackled Otello, who came first. Though occasionally stretched, he is in robust, youthful voice and acts with his usual skill and intelligence for RCA's 1976 set.

James Levine conducts the National Philharmonic Orchestra with a revelatory vividness and detail. The score bristles with life and bustles with activity as never before (perhaps a little too relentlessly) but the conductor also brings an expansive grandeur to the big moments. As Maddalena, Renata Scotto tends towards wildness at the top of her voice, but she conveys a sense of character with every note of her moving portrayal. Sherrill Milnes offers an

intelligent Gérard, even if the voice lacks Italianate bite. There are some outstanding performances in the smaller roles, not least from the young Maria Ewing as Bersi.

Decca spares no expense to outdo its rival in terms of casting for **Riccardo Chailly's** 1982 recording. We have Astrid Varnay, no less, as an overly formidable Contessa, while Christa Ludwig is simply magnificent as Madelon. The conducting is generous and luxurious, and the playing – the National Philharmonic Orchestra once more – is high quality and efficient. The singing of the principals is similar: Luciano Pavarotti lavishes lashings of his golden tone on Chénier to eloquent and supremely musical effect; but there's not much character beyond the glorious notes. And I find it difficult to warm to Montserrat Caballé's Maddalena, who can often sound matronly and uninvolved, despite rising to a fine, noble 'La mamma morta'. Leo Nucci's Gérard is smooth and idiomatic but lacks individuality.

José Carreras joins his colleagues a little late, perhaps (in 1987), but nevertheless offers what's arguably the most dramatically convincing Chénier of the three: ardent, impassioned and with a winning recklessness. Beside him is an authentically Italianate if somewhat uninvolved Gérard from Giorgio Zancanaro. Eva Marton, only shortly before she tackled Elektra and Brünnhilde in the studio, sweeps all before her as Maddalena. There's plenty of fire and rambunctiousness in the playing and

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1931 Marini ^c , Bruna-Rasa ^M , Galeffi ^c ; La Scala, Milan / Molajoli	Naxos © ② 8 110066/7
1941 Gigli ^c , Caniglia ^M , Bechi ^c ; La Scala, Milan / De Fabritiis	Naxos © ② 8 110275/6 (10/68 ⁿ)
1955 Del Monaco ^c , Callas ^M , Protti ^c ; La Scala, Milan / Votto	Warner Classics © ② 9029 58445-6 (11/02 ⁿ)
1956 Hopf ^c , Schech ^M , Metternich ^c ; Bavarian RSO / Sawallisch [sung in German]	Walhall ④ ② WLCD0197
1957 Del Monaco ^c , Tebaldi ^M , Bastianini ^c ; S Cecilia Orch / Gavazzeni	Decca © ② 425 407-2DM2 (1/58 ⁿ ; 7/60 ⁿ)
1960 Tucker ^c , Tebaldi ^M , Bastianini ^c ; Met Op, New York / Cleva	Myto © ② MCD00252
1960 Corelli ^c , Tebaldi ^M , Bastianini ^c ; Vienna St Op / Matačić	Orfeo ④ ② C682 062I (3/07)
1963 Corelli ^c , Stella ^M , Sereni ^c ; Rome Op / Santini	Warner © ② ② 2435 65287-5 (9/64 ⁿ ; 5/95 ⁿ)
1972 Bergonzi ^c , Kabaivanska ^M , Protti ^c ; Comunale Th, Genoa / Peloso	Living Stage ④ ② LS1114
1973 Corelli ^c , Casapietra ^M , Cappuccilli ^c ; RAI Orch / Bartoletti	Hardy ④ ② HCD4008 (4/03)
1976 Domingo ^c , Scotto ^M , Milnes ^c ; Nat PO / Levine	RCA © ② 88697 57615-2 (8/77 ⁿ ; 9/89 ⁿ)
1981 Domingo ^c , Beňačková ^M , Cappuccilli ^c ; Vienna St Op / Santi	DG ④ ② 073 4070GH
1982 Pavarotti ^c , Caballé ^M , Nucci ^c ; Nat PO / Chailly	Decca ④ ② 410 117-2DH2 (2/85)
1985 Domingo ^c , Tomowa-Sintow ^M , Zancanaro ^c ; Royal Op / Rudel	Warner Music Vision ④ ② 5046 68357-2 (5/04)
1987 Carreras ^c , Marton ^M , Zancanaro ^c ; Hungarian St Orch / Patané	CBS ④ ② M2K42369 (11/87)
1989 Bonisolli ^c , Guleghina ^M , Bruson ^c ; Frankfurt RSO / Viotti	Capriccio ④ ② C51189 or C60014-2
1996 Pavarotti ^c , Guleghina ^M , Pons ^c ; Met Op, New York / Levine	Decca ④ ② 074 3421DH
2005 F Armiliato ^c , Dessi ^M , Gueffi ^c ; Giuseppe Verdi SO, Milan / Sutej	Universal © ② 476 4180
2006 Cura ^c , Guleghina ^M , Gueffi ^c ; Comunale Th, Bologna / Rizzi	Arthaus Musik ④ ② 107 287 (10/06 ⁿ)
2007 Bocelli ^c , Urmann ^M , Gallo ^c ; Giuseppe Verdi SO, Milan / M Armiliato	Decca ④ ② 478 2382DH2 (7/10)
2011 Sandoval ^c , Fantini ^M , Hendricks ^c ; Vienna SO / Schirmer	C Major ④ ② 707908; ④ ② 708004 (1/12)
2015 Kaufmann ^c , Westbroek ^M , Lučić ^c ; Royal Op / Pappano	Warner Classics ④ ② 9029 59379-6; ④ ② 9029 59377-9 (12/16)

Key: ^cAndrea Chénier ^MMaddalena de Coigny ^cCarlo Gérard

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Domingo is in 'robust, youthful' voice as Chénier in the 1970s

singing of the Hungarian forces under **Giuseppe Patanè**, but this set ultimately loses out to its more consistent rivals.

A couple of years later, *Capriccio* was on hand to capture Franco Bonisoli present his Chénier at a Frankfurt concert. He sings with unexpected sensitivity, which is matched by **Marcello Viotti**'s easy-going conducting. It's an appealing performance, but the tenor's voice is fuzzy, and the smooth engineering takes the edge off Maria Guleghina's Maddalena and Renato Bruson's Gérard.

The final two studio sets bring us back to where we started, to Milan, but to the Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra rather than La Scala. The one from 2007, under **Marco Armiliato**, can be swiftly dismissed for Andrea Bocelli's ill-advised stab at the title-role. He offers some musicality, admittedly, but his thin-sounding, uncertain Chénier sounds like a toy trumpet beside the real deal of his great predecessors. Violeta Urmana's imperious Maddalena is wasted in the context, and I recommend giving the veteran Elena Obraztsova's wild Madelon a wide berth.

There's a far greater honesty to a Universal Italy release recorded two years earlier, featuring Fabio Armiliato and the late Daniela Dessì as the doomed lovers.

It's not terribly well recorded, admittedly, and only routinely conducted by **Vjekoslav Sutej**; Carlo Guelfi is a dry-sounding Gérard, too. But Dessì offers a rich, big-hearted Maddalena, and Armiliato is a likeable if small-scale Chénier.

ANDREA CHÉNIER ON FILM

It might be some time before another studio recording of the opera, but the latest filmed version, from Covent Garden, offers some of the care and attention one might expect for such a project, cast with sensitivity from top to bottom and impeccably prepared. Its star is Jonas Kaufmann, who offers a poet of remarkable sensitivity and intelligence, albeit one lacking the robust, tireless vocalism of many of his predecessors. David McVicar's 2015 production puts a premium on prettiness but, beautifully filmed in HD, is difficult to fault for its fidelity. Željko Lučić has some issues with intonation, but is a vivid Gérard. Eva-Maria Westbroek joins Kaufmann as a very

decent Maddalena, but neither can quite offer the fireworks that would ideally match **Antonio Pappano**'s impassioned, loving conducting.

There's no shortage of fiery vocalism in the 2006 Bologna DVD starring José Cura and Guleghina, very well conducted by **Carlo Rizzi** and traditionally directed by Giancarlo del Monaco, the great tenor's son. But it doesn't avoid a certain campiness, and the film shows its age. For a more interesting take on the piece, head to the Bregenz Festival 2011 and Keith Warner's staging, with its breathtaking set by David Fielding.

Ulf Schirmer conducts a respectable cast, but the interest is in the imaginative production, conceived on a huge scale – though not all will like the newly composed interludes based on revolutionary songs, which are novel but jar with Giordano's score.

There's some marvellous singing from Pavarotti under **James Levine** at the Met in a lavishly staged and cast show, but this 1996 film now also looks rather dated, not least thanks to video direction that favours too many unflattering close-ups. Corelli fans won't want to miss his RAI film from 1973 (conducted by **Bruno Bartoletti**), the best of the older films, but it's arguably Domingo's two video performances, in excellent period

stagings, that are the most satisfying of the pre-HD age. The first, filmed in 1981, has the added bonus of **Nello Santi** conducting a Vienna State Opera Orchestra on fabulous form. Domingo acts and sings with impassioned commitment, offering a fully believable character, and is matched all the way by Piero Cappuccilli's terrific Gérard. Gabriela Beňačková is a touching if not entirely idiomatic Maddalena.

Four years later, Domingo sang the role at Covent Garden in a performance that, though one has to do without the Viennese orchestra, is perhaps even more consistent. The Royal Opera House orchestra plays extremely well for **Julius Rudel**, and the Spanish tenor is on ideally robust, golden form. He is paired with a noble Maddalena from Anna Tomowa-Sintow; Giorgio Zancanaro, away from the studio, offers a Gérard of complex humanity – and stunningly well sung.

PASSING JUDGEMENT

Given its relatively patchy discography, picking a favourite *Andrea Chénier* perhaps more than ever relies on personal preferences for voices, and on weighing up the invigorating rough and tumble of the opera house against the contrived cleanliness of the studio. But, though there are at least half a dozen live recordings that offer irresistible thrills, the 1960 Vienna performance, in eminently acceptable sound and with outstanding orchestral playing under Matačić, gives the fewest associated spills.

On film, meanwhile, I wouldn't want to be without either Domingo DVD, but the all-round higher definition of the Royal Opera's latest production makes that the best starting point. No *Chénier* fan will want to be without the 1941 De Fabritiis recording, but for a top-choice studio set, I think it has to be Domingo again, on Levine's RCA account. It's not vocally ideal, but no other modern recording does so much to persuade the listener of the quality of the score while offering a cast that can really communicate the drama as well as sing the notes. **G**

TOP CHOICE

National Philharmonic Orch / James Levine
RCA © ② 88697 57615-2

There's better singing elsewhere in the discography, but James Levine's excitingly conducted, vividly recorded version strikes the best balance of any modern studio set. The cast – including Domingo as Chénier – offers drama and robust vocalism.



PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

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Jerome I. Greene Performance Space, New York & WQXR/online

**First recital of 2018 Gilmore Award recipient,
January 4**

Given every four years, the Gilmore Artist Award is a cash offering of \$300,000 to an international pianist of any age and nationality in recognition of their artistry. This concert will be the 2018 recipient's first as holder of the award. Right now we can't tell you who it will be, as the announcement will actually be on January 4. However, we *can* tell you that previous awardees include Kirill Gerstein, Ingrid Filter, Piotr Anderszewski, David Owen Norris and, in 2014, Rafał Blechacz. As for further explanation of the prize, the process itself is non-competitive: a group of international music professionals nominate pianists, after which an anonymous six-member jury appraise their musicianship and abilities over time through numerous performances under varying conditions, the candidates themselves unaware that they're even under consideration. Those not in New York can catch this recital via the city's classical radio station WQXR, which will not only be broadcasting it on its normal airwaves,

but also video live-streaming it on its website and Facebook Live page.

**wqxr.org; facebook.com/WQXRClassical;
thegilmore.org**

Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco & KDFC MTT conducts Ax in Mozart and Schoenberg, January 11 live & January 23 on KDFC

Back in October, Michael Tilson Thomas announced that in 2020 he will be stepping down from the musical directorship of the San Francisco Symphony. It's been an extraordinary and trailblazing tenure that will have lasted 25 seasons, the most recent recorded fruit of which has been their release of the complete Schumann symphonies. This particular concert, recorded for later broadcast on San Francisco's classical music radio station KDFC, stars Emanuel Ax in a blockbuster double-header of concertos, Mozart's Piano Concerto No 14 followed by the Schoenberg concerto. Bookending those two works are Beethoven's *Leonore* No 3 Overture and Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*. If you happen to be in San Francisco, there will be an open rehearsal on the morning of January 11. **sfsymphony.org; kdfc.com**

Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Grosser Saal & online

**Mariss Jansons conducts Strauss and
Prokofiev, January 13**

Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie is one year old this month, so there will no doubt be something special in the air for all its January concerts. We're drawing your attention to this visit from Mariss Jansons and the Bavarian RSO, being one that the Elbphilharmonie itself sees as a highlight, and is consequently video live-streaming. Their programme features Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* and Prokofiev's Symphony No 5. If you miss it live, it will remain online for catch-up viewing. **elbphilharmonie.de**

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & cinemas nationwide

Rigoletto, January 16

Based on the Victor Hugo play *Le roi s'amuse*, this was the opera that Verdi once stated to be his best, and it returns to Covent Garden here in the acclaimed production by David McVicar which puts the spotlight on the cruelty of the Mantuan court. Furthermore, the cast assembled for this production, conducted

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

François-Xavier Roth's Bruckner cycle in Cologne continues with a magnificent partner, Ligeti's Violin Concerto

Ligeti · Bruckner

The contrast of evolution and eruption in Ligeti and Bruckner makes them a fine complement in concert. There's a mellow, old-fashioned legato warmth to Christian Tetzlaff's tone in the second movement of Ligeti's Violin Concerto, rendered all the more strange and alien ('a sort of non-existent far-Eastern culture', as the composer said of the music of Claude Vivier) by the quartet of ocarinas haunting the texture.

Placed forward in the balance, Tetzlaff is on scintillating form in a concerto which he rates (in a revealing, German-only interview during the interview of this Gürzenich concert) as the most beautiful example of the genre in our time, and he plays like he means it; both the Intermezzo and the furious final cadenza arrive at their



unquiet closures with meticulously articulated surreal cascades.

The Gürzenich orchestral support is unusually full-bodied, bringing the concerto into oblique relations with the concerto mainstream, and the players respond with even greater alacrity to

François-Xavier Roth's idiosyncratically French-accented way with Bruckner's Third Symphony. Having chosen the composer's original and most garrulous version, Roth fairly dances his way through the symphony's longeurs with a Schubertian lightness of spirit. Vibrato is slimmed down but not eliminated; the conductor has a fine feeling for both the ethereal aspiration of the Third (in whichever version) as well as its quirky orchestration, and he builds up textures with the

patient ear of one trained both in organ and contemporary music: very much a Brucknerian for our times, whose ongoing cycle in Cologne is worth following on film at the orchestra's site. **Peter Quanttrill**
Available to listen to for free at
<http://en.guerzenich-orchester.de/go-plus>

The Berliner Philharmoniker's first Composer in Residence is the subject of an engaging short documentary

Short Rides with John Adams

This engaging short film coincides with the release of the Berlin Philharmonic's lavish new set of recordings of works by John Adams (reviewed on page 32), serving as both a trailer to that set and an introduction to Adams and the works that Berliners got to know during his year-long stint as the orchestra's first Composer in Residence.

The appointment, of course, originated with Simon Rattle, whose association with the composer spans several decades. Inevitably it also brings in another longterm Rattle collaborator, Peter Sellars, the librettist (and elsewhere director) of so many of Adams's stage works, including *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, discussed here.

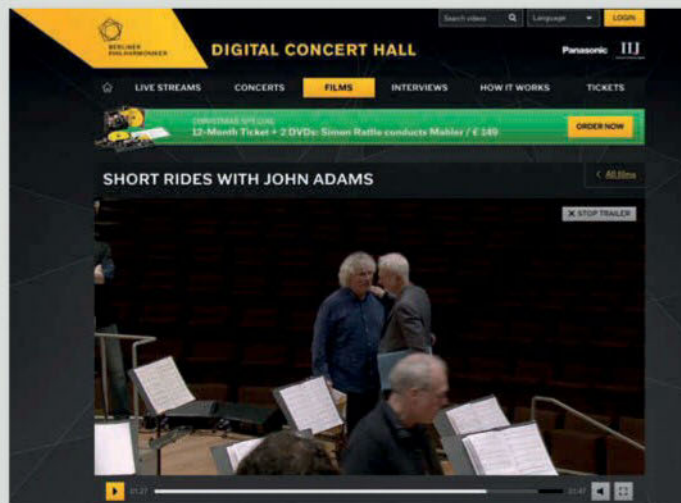
There are other extracts from performances, plus contributions from Rattle, Gustavo Dudamel, Alan Gilbert and Leila Josefowicz (dedicatee of *Scheherazade.2*), as well as musicians

from the orchestra. The concertmaster Noah Bendix-Balgley is especially interesting on the special sort of internalisation he says is required for players to find their way through the composer's scores.

The film is gentle, thoughtful and unrushed, very much reflecting its primary subject. Adams himself comes across as warmly collegial as well as refreshingly modest and, as he reflects on his being an American in Berlin during turbulent times back home, politically astute and courageous. Fascinating, rewarding viewing.

Hugo Shirley

Available via various subscription packages to the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com



by Alexander Joel, is a fine one: Michael Fabiano sings the Duke of Mantua and Dimitri Plataniotis takes the title role of Rigoletto, while Lucy Crowe is Gilda.

roh.org.uk/showings

The Gothenburg Concert Hall & online at GSOPlay

Klaus Mäkelä conducts Daniel Lozakovich in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, January 18

The young Swedish violinist Daniel Lozakovich isn't yet a regular sight and sound on UK or US concert stages, but if you've been lucky to catch one of his many concerts on the continent (or spotted his signing to DG, aged 15, in 2016) then you'll know that it's only a matter of time before he really is everywhere, because he's a genuinely extraordinary player, combining a jaw-droppingly flawless technique – just watch his bowing arm – with true musicality and depth. So this Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra concert appearance in the technically demanding Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto is really one worth catching. Furthermore, directing Lozakovich and the orchestra is the fast-rising Finnish conductor Klaus Mäkelä, himself still only in his early twenties, so it really is a feast of prodigious talent all round. The concert is video live-streamed (and archived afterwards) for free on the orchestra's GSOPlay website. The programme also features Shostakovich's Symphony No 10.

gso.se/en/gsoeplay/video/makela/
Two Nordic geniuses

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

David McVicar's new production of Tosca, January 26

This may be a bold pronouncement to make in January, but it's very much looking as though David McVicar's new production of *Tosca* for the Met will be one of the operatic highlights of the year. So it's great news for all of us that it's also the production with which the Met is kicking off its 2018 Live in HD offerings. As for what's known at this point, there's the promise that McVicar has remained faithful to Verdi's times and locations. Also, if an interview with McVicar last year is anything to go by, it's going to be sumptuous: 'There's something about the way that this bodice-ripping melodrama launches with those amazing brass chords in the orchestra, which seems to be saying, "This is Rome". It needs an MGM treatment.' It's an exciting line-up of artists too, with a cast including Sonya Yoncheva in the title role, Vittorio Grigolo as her lover Cavaradossi, and Sir Bryn Terfel as the depraved Chief of Police, Scarpia.

metopera.org

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online

Nikolaj Znaider and Saleem Ashkar team up for Mozart's Piano Concerto No 20, January 27

Nikolaj Znaider and Saleem Ashkar are regular collaborators both as chamber partners and as orchestral conductor and soloist; in fact last month saw them in France partnering for the Schumann Piano Concerto with the

Orchestre National de Lyon. So we can expect strong conductor-soloist chemistry from this performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 20 with the Detroit Symphony, and all the more so given both musicians are also acclaimed Mozartians. Partnering the Mozart is Elgar's Symphony No 2. You can catch the concert in person on both January 26 and 27, but the second performance is the one being video live-streamed (then kept online for catch-up viewing) as one of the orchestra's Live from Orchestra Hall webcasts and on Facebook Live. dso.org/live

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With a jury chaired by Qian Zhou, the Head of Strings at Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, this triennial competition offers cash prizes totalling \$110,000 (US), with the top six competitors also eligible for the three-year loan of a rare violin from the Rin Collection. The events are being streamed live on the SIVC Facebook page, offering listeners the usual nail-biting thrills of rooting for their favourite competitors but also the chance to hear the violin virtuoso Shlomo Mintz conducting the Conservatory Orchestra at the Victoria Concert Hall, and also the renowned Singapore Symphony Orchestra accompanying the finalists.

singaporeviolincompetition.com; [facebook.com/singaporeinternationalviolincompetition](https://www.facebook.com/singaporeinternationalviolincompetition)

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THIS MONTH A powerful, flexible integrated amplifier, an excellent pocket music player and a look back over 2017's trends and stars **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

Streaming on the move, smart 'phones and more

As if you didn't have enough listening options, this month's new arrivals create alternative possibilities

One of the most talked about products of 2016 was Chord's little pocket-sized DAC/headphone amplifier, Mojo, bringing the company's in-house digital-to-analogue conversion to an extremely portable unit. At the time of the launch, the company spoke of an even smaller bolt-in device designed to turn the DAC into a complete streaming source, and now it's here, in the form of the £499 Poly. When used with the £399 DAC to create a MojoPoly **1**, the new device allows music to be played from Wi-Fi sources such as network-connected NAS drives or from phones and tablets via AirPlay or Bluetooth. It has a built-in micro SD card reader to allow music to be carried around and played when out of Wi-Fi range and is powered via an internal battery good for nine hours' use from a four-hour charge. As well as PCM-based file formats up to 768kHz sampling rate, Poly can handle DSD all the way up to DSD256/11.2MHz. It can even work as a network music server, making content stored on an inserted micro SD card available to other players on the network.

Also on the streaming music front, dCS has announced that it's rolling out MQA compatibility **2** across its range, allowing



its DACs to handle the reduced-size 'audio origami' files supported by the major music labels and streaming service Tidal. The first product to gain the free upgrade was the Rossini, followed by the Vivaldi One and Network Bridge, with the Vivaldi DAC itself due to get the boost this month.

NAD is expanding its range with the £499 C 328 amplifier **3**, sitting at the opposite end of the C 3- range to the C 388 reviewed overleaf. It has both analogue and digital inputs, including a high-quality moving magnet phono stage and Bluetooth wireless connectivity, and this model delivers 50Wpc. Also new from NAD is the C 328, a £749 stereo power amplifier capable of 2x80W or 300W when bridged into mono, and the C 588 turntable. Selling for £449, this new design is belt-driven, uses a hefty anti-resonance MDF plinth and glass platter, and comes fitted with an Ortofon OM10 cartridge.

Bowers & Wilkins has expanded its headphone range with the PX **4**, which sells for £330 in a choice of iPhone-matching Space Grey and Soft Gold finishes. As well as intelligent operation – hang the 'phones round the neck to stop playback, lift an earcup to pause it – the PX can be used with a dedicated app on a connected phone or tablet, allowing the user to customise the three noise cancellation modes for 'City', 'Office' or 'Flight' use, as well as other settings. Another speaker company with new headphones is Focal, whose Clear model **5** sells for £1399 and claims performance advances over the previous Elear model thanks to improved drivers.

More from Focal in the form of the Kanta No 2 speaker **6**, set to be the first of a new series slotting in below the first of a new series slotting in below the French company's Sopra range. It uses a combination of proprietary technologies including a Beryllium dome tweeter and flax sandwich-coned mid/bass units, and is a three-way floorstanding model standing some 1.1m tall. Priced at £6995 per pair, it will be followed next year by larger and smaller models to create a complete line. **G**

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JANUARY TEST DISCS



This beautiful set of Sibelius's piano music by Leif Ove Andsnes has real focus and depth, delicacy and occasional explosive power, made more striking in 96kHz/24 bit.



An album of Nordic folk music wonderfully played by the Danish String Quartet, and with an intimate, demonstration-quality sound captured in this 96kHz/24 bit release from ECM.

REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

NAD C 388

The most powerful NAD 'Hybrid Digital DAC Amplifier' is well equipped and an entirely compelling performer

Full Disclosure Power – it's an interesting concept in a market where the output of amplifiers is much discussed but little understood. Too often buyers aim for the highest number their budget will afford, thinking more must be better but without looking closely at how those numbers are quoted, let alone what they mean in real-world listening. These days amplifier power is quoted into an 8 ohm load, sometimes with a subsidiary (higher) figure given for the output into 4 ohms, but even here there's room for manoeuvre: the figure is sometimes given with a higher allowance for distortion, at 1kHz rather than across a more meaningful 20Hz-20kHz spread, and even with only one channel driven.

Full Disclosure Power is a NAD thing. The Canadian-based manufacturer makes it clear that the numbers it gives are across a sensible frequency range, with a given level of distortion, and says its amplifiers do what they claim, even when faced with speakers presenting a demanding load or, even worse, with wayward impedance variations by frequency.

The C 388 amplifier we have here, the largest and most powerful in the company's three-strong 'Hybrid Digital DAC Amplifier' line, sells for £1499 and

is capable of delivering the same 150W continuous power into 8 ohm or 4 ohm speaker loads, and delivering 'dynamic power' – ie for instantaneous peaks in the music – of 250W into 8 ohms, rising to 400W into 2 ohms. It does this using a NAD-modified version of the Hypex UcD Class D amplifier module – not, as is commonly thought, a digital amplifier but a switching analogue design with exceptionally good handling of the demands of varying load impedance as well as high current capability. The NAD additions mean lower distortion, while the use of a driver stage and output sections built with discrete components further reduce distortion. Add to that a NAD-designed switch-mode power supply built for low interference, both electrical and acoustic, and you have an amplifier not only designed for high power but also with both low distortion and high energy efficiency.

But that's only half the story. As well as being an amplifier designed for analogue sources, with three inputs including a very good moving magnet phono stage, the C 388 has both conventional digital inputs – two optical and two coaxial – and built-in Bluetooth with aptX capability, allowing wireless streaming of audio from phones,

NAD C 388



Type Integrated stereo amplifier

Price £1499

Inputs Two line, MM phono, two optical and two coaxial digital, Bluetooth with aptX; optional MDC modules add extra inputs

Outputs Two sets of speakers, pre-outs/subwoofer outputs, headphones

Output power 150Wpc into 8 ohm or 4 ohm

Tone controls Yes

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Bluetooth antenna

Dimensions (WxHxD) 40.7x71x43.5cm

nadelectronics.com

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(UK distribution)

tablets and computers. That opens up a whole range of connectivity possibilities, from playing iTunes or streaming music services straight from the palm of your hand through your hi-fi system to the connection of a computer or even a TV to allow the viewing of the increasingly popular 'live concert hall' services.

The Bluetooth implementation also allows the C 388 to operate as either a 'sink' – ie a device to which other units can send music, as is usual with amplifiers of this kind – or as a source, for example playing music out to Bluetooth headphones or speakers. It also allows the NAD Remote

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

With optional streaming available, here's how to make the C 388 the heart of a CD-playing system ...

NAD C 568

NAD has a strong reputation for CD hardware and the C 568 builds on the success of the acclaimed C 546BEE with enhanced performance and refinement.



KEF Q950

With plenty of power on tap, the C 388 will match well with big, hard-hitting speakers: the KEF Q950 combines UniQ technology for precision with 20cm bass drivers.



App on smartphones or tablets to control the amplifier, in addition to or in place of the provided learning remote handset.

However, even all that – plus the provision of two sets of switched speaker outputs, along with various custom-install-friendly connections including 12V trigger, RS232 computer control and the ability to accept an external infrared remote receiver – isn't the whole story here. Like other amplifiers in the NAD range, from this C line-up all the way through to its massive Masters Series, the C 388 is built using the company's Modular Design Construction, which provides a pair of slots to the left of the rear panel, into which can be inserted expansion modules to provide upgrades or add facilities.

There's no sign of stress or strain about the sound and there's every sense of bags of energy in reserve for the dynamic swings of the music

In the case of the C 388, the headline add-on is the MDC DD-BluOS Module, which sells for around £300 and adds not just compatibility with the products made with sister company Bluesound's BluOS multiroom system but also playback of music stored on a local network, plus services such as Spotify Connect and Tidal, complete with MQA compatibility for Tidal Masters files. USB storage devices containing music can also be connected via one of the module's two USB Type A ports – yes, there's a USB socket on the amplifier itself, but this is provided purely for service purposes, and won't allow you to play music. The other USB port on the module can be used with the supplied Wi-Fi dongle should you wish to connect the amplifier wirelessly to your network, the BluOS system being designed to handle even hi-res music over wireless, and there's also an Ethernet port for wired network connection.

PERFORMANCE

Like the other C Series NAD amplifiers, the C 388 belies its performance with a design that's extremely easy to set up, use

and live with. Installing the BluOS Module is the work of a few moments, and control is then via a dedicated app for Android or iOS devices; but even used 'bare' the amplifier is both simple and logical. The menu system allows inputs to be renamed as well as enabled or disabled, turns the tone controls on and off and adjusts them, as well as switching the pre-out sockets on the rear between full-range – for example to drive an external power amplifier – and subwoofer out, with or without high pass filtering, which delivers all frequencies below around 150Hz to a connected subwoofer and not through the amplifier's own outputs.

The sound lives up to all the promise of that amplifier design. I've used the junior sibling, the C 368, in the past, and this amplifier takes that formula of insight and power and adds to it – well, even more insight and power. The major impression is of an amplifier very much working within its own limits, even when you push the levels up past the exciting point: there's no sign of stress or strain about the sound, even with the largest of orchestral works, and there's every sense of bags of energy in reserve for the dynamic swings of the music.

That means the NAD always sounds assured and entirely in control, but without any sense of sitting on the music or holding things back. With the joyous sound of the Danish Quartet's 'Last Leaf' album of Nordic folk music (ECM, 12/17), the speed and resolution are very much in evidence, along with a lovely fluid view of the instrumental timbres, and it maintains this level of detail and definition when you play larger-scale works such as Scriabin's Second Symphony (Gergiev), in another of those vibrant LSO Live recordings (7/16). The weight and bass definition are excellent, giving the sound a richness and warmth; but this is never overbearing and the overall presentation has a natural, smooth balance that's immensely attractive.

There's no shortage of competition at the C 388's price-level, with models such as the big Rotel RA-1572 coming in at about £100 less and offering a similar specification, albeit in a rather larger and more overtly macho form-factor than the slimline, understated NAD. But the

Or you could try...

As mentioned in the main review, the NAD isn't exactly without competition, and the heavyweight integrated amplifier has staged something of a comeback after a period when it seemed there was a yawning gap between sub-£1000 offerings and those priced up in the stratosphere.

Rotel RA-1572

The Rotel RA-1572 is a recent addition



to the sector and combines the company's traditional virtues of solid build and high power for the money. At £1395, it also has a sophisticated digital section including Bluetooth, multiple digital inputs and a USB Type B input for direct connection of a computer. See rotel.com for more.

Arcam A39

Coming in at a lower price is the Arcam A39 at £1249. Using the same Class G 'turbocharger' circuitry as the massive A49 integrated, it's a pure all-analogue design, and – as with its rivals here – has a high-quality phono stage built in. But Arcam offers a solution for those wanting to add digital inputs: the A39 has a power output for the company's add-on R-line digital devices. For more details see arcam.co.uk



Naim NAIT XS 2

Also resolutely analogue is the Naim NAIT XS 2, the latest in a long line of slimline integrated amps from the Salisbury company. Six analogue inputs are provided – the £1859 amplifier is line-only – and the design is influenced by that of the pricier SuperNAIT, with which the XS 2 shares the ability to be upgraded with one of Naim's offboard power supplies. More information at naimaudio.com



opportunity to integrate music streaming – which works very well indeed – into the C 388 makes it an appealing prospect, and the performance is more than up to the standards of the class. **G**

● REVIEW ONKYO DP-S1

Pocketable versatility

A little player that packs a serious punch with both its sound and its remarkable range of facilities

The digital music player market seems to be booming, with great-sounding pocketable devices from the likes of Astell & Kern, Fiio and stablemates Onkyo and Pioneer. And the Onkyo DP-S1 is one of the more compact offerings: this £399 machine is smaller than the company's DP-X1 model but – although rather thicker than the AK Jr I tend to use for much of my travelling – it has a chunky, solid feel and comes absolutely loaded with functionality.

That solidity is no illusion. The Onkyo's main housing is milled out of one lump of aluminium and finished in a durable black coating, while a textured rear panel improves 'grippability'. Controls are fairly minimal: there's a thumbwheel for volume semi-recessed to the right of the display, plus a sliding switch to lock the controls further down that panel, plus the usual play/pause and track skip buttons on the left. That side also houses slots to accept two tiny micro SD cards to expand the 16GB internal storage, while on the bottom panel is the micro USB input for connection to a computer and charging.

On top of the unit is the power/standby button and two headphone sockets: a standard 3.5mm headphone/line out and a 2.5mm four-pole connection for use with balanced headphones, should you have a pair to hand. That last function is made possible by the Onkyo's dual-DAC configuration, using the celebrated ESS Sabre technology found in some very upmarket hardware, and the rest of this little player is also designed to maximise sound quality.

For a start, there's the file-format compatibility. The DP-S1 shows its mobile phone rivals a clean pair of heels by not only handling PCM-based files all the way up to 192kHz/32 bit but also DSD64/2.8MHz and 128/5.6MHz. Dual digital clocks – one for 44.1kHz and its multiples, the other for 48/96/192kHz – reduces the jitter noise possible when sampling rates are converted, and there's also the option of upsampling lower bit-rate files to 192kHz/32 bit, a choice of digital filters and an adjustable digital lock range, again reducing jitter.

The Onkyo also has built-in Bluetooth – to allow it to be used with suitable wireless headphones – and Wi-Fi. The latter is handy for software updates when the unit is connected to a home network but more

importantly also allows it to access streaming music services, including Tidal with MQA capability for those Masters albums, and internet radio via the TuneIn platform.

Files can be loaded on to the DP-S1 via USB using the Onkyo X-DAP Link software (for Windows) or via simple 'drag and drop', the internal storage and any memory cards in place appearing as separate drives on the desktop of the connected computer. Or of course one can write to the memory cards directly using a computer and a suitable reader/adaptor, and then transfer them over to the player.

PERFORMANCE

Although small, the Onkyo has a lot for the user to explore, so it's useful that the display menu layout is clear and logical, and offers functions including the customisation of the player's physical buttons, whose functions are locked out when the 'hold' slider is used, the display time out and automatic power off to save the battery; switching between line-out and headphone mode; and so on. And aside from the slight fiddliness of entering Wi-Fi passwords and the like – small (2.4in) screen, old eyes! – the DP-S1 is a delight to use and capable of a very good sound indeed. I used it both into a range of earphones and headphones, from my elderly Phonak Audéo/Snugs in-ears through to Bang & Olufsen, Focal and Oppo over-ears, and fed from the line output into a variety of amplifiers.

The sound has weight and substance, detail and definition, and is capable of a highly enjoyable presentation. The provision of high-quality digital-to-analogue conversion and selected components in the audio signal path has clearly paid dividends: the Onkyo sounds like anything but a tiny pocket device, but is rather big and bold across content from the intimately detailed to the full-force orchestral.

It's worth noting that, after some trial and error, I found the following settings gave the best sound, at least with hi-res files: upsampling and 'Hi-Bit 32' turned off and the jitter lock set to the midpoint between 'narrow' and normal. Also worth doing, if you're using the Onkyo into headphones, is selecting the variable line output instead of the seemingly obvious headphone setting. This enables the player



ONKYO DP-S1

Type Digital Music Player

Price £399

Connectivity Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, 3.5mm headphone/line out, 2.5mm balanced headphone out, micro USB for file transfer and recharging

File formats handled MP3, AAC, MQA, FLAC/ALAC/WAV/AIFF (up to 192kHz/32 bit), DSD2.8/5.6MHz

Other formats Deezer, Tidal (subject to subscription), internet radio

Storage capacity 16GB, expandable via two micro SD slots

Battery life (claimed) 15hrs max, playing 96kHz/24 bit with screen off and using headphones


Dimensions (WxHxD) 6.3x9.4x1.5cm

Weight 130g

uk.onkyo.com

to deliver a more dynamic sound, although it will default back and need resetting every time you disconnect and reconnect the headphones, or power the player off then on again: something to do with European sound-limiting legislation, it seems.

All that done, instrumental timbres are strikingly realistic, as are the sound stage pictures the player can create, which are impressive enough via headphones but even more so when it is used as the source for a system with speakers. In fact this is a remarkable-sounding little player, as is clear when playing Leif Ove Andsnes's Sibelius set in 96kHz/24 bit, where the delicacy of the sound is as striking as the way the recorded acoustic is delineated, as it is with the rhythms of Rameau's *Pygmalion* (Aparté, 11/17) also in 96kHz/24 bit. And it's notable how much more listenable the Onkyo's upscaling makes even radio streams.

The DP-S1 makes a strong case for the benefits of a dedicated music player, especially one with so wide a range of abilities. I think my phone can stick to being a phone for a while yet – or at least a phone/camera/web browser/email client ... 

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● **ESSAY**

For all the changes, music remains centre stage

In 2017 the consumer electronics industry kept on inventing new ways for us to listen, from the growth of streaming services to the ability to control your system with your voice

No, 2017 wasn't the year in which streaming came of age and CDs and LPs were consigned to history. Arguably streaming in its various forms was already well established before that; and while there are a few dissenting voices suggesting the 'vinyl revival' may have peaked, CDs continue to be a popular way of buying music – even if, like me, you simply rip them on to a server and then play them via some kind of network device.

What the past 12 months have seen is a consolidation of the idea that music can be made available just about wherever and whenever you want it, from multiroom systems through to personal music players such as the Onkyo DP-S1 reviewed on page 118. You can now buy truly wireless Bluetooth earphones without the need for a neckband to contain all the electronics, speakers designed to become part of your home decor in the form of the Bang & Olufsen BeoSound Shape system I discussed last month and even devices designed to bring voice control to your home hi-fi. But for all the changes, it's gratifying to see that music is still very much centre stage. Technologies such as Roon and MQA – promising an enhanced streaming experience and better sound over even the slowest connection respectively – have been making inroads across the specialist audio market, with more brands adopting them, but if you asked me what I would mark out as the Next Big Thing, voice control would have to be it.

I have to admit to some cynicism when I first encountered Amazon's Alexa, although I bought the little Echo Dot device, which has no built-in speaker but can play music to any Bluetooth-equipped device you happen to have to hand. However, suddenly it seems all this is getting a bit serious, with Alexa and Google Assistant vying for attention – we love a format war in consumer electronics! – and third-party manufacturers signing up to use the technology. Bose is on board with Google and can even supply you with a pair of voice-operated headphones, Sony has started to unveil Assistant-capable wireless speakers and two of the biggest names in multiroom audio, Sonos and Yamaha, are in the Alexa camp. Well, sort of: while Sonos has launched its Alexa-enabled ONE speaker and extended compatibility across its system, word is that it won't be any



great surprise if next year it also announces Google Assistant compliance, just to ensure it is technology-agnostic.

Keeping up with this changing landscape is a challenge for hi-fi companies, as Naim's experience has shown. Having spent more than three years developing its 'platform for the future', Naim discovered after announcing it back in October 2016 that getting all the licences and compliances in place was more of a challenge than it had thought. Fortunately, now the products are in the shops, they sound very good indeed, as you may have read in my review of the Uniti Nova (11/17), and Naim is now busy keeping up with demand and adding extra features made possible by the new software/hardware package ①.

The latest addition is Roon, on which readers may gather I am quite keen, as it gives by far the most satisfying online music experience. Yes, it's a little expensive, at US\$119 a year or \$499 for a lifetime subscription, but the way it handles metadata and integrates internet radio, streaming services such as Tidal and one's own music seamlessly, and even suggests music to play after your chosen tracks, is a thing of wonder. In fact, were there an accolade for my favourite audio product of the year, Roon would definitely be in the running. But then, this has been another year full of standout products, and as ever the problem isn't finding equipment to fill these pages but rather finding space for the players, amplifiers, speakers and more I want to bring to your attention.

For example, the Marantz SA10, the company's DAC-less digital player

reviewed in April, was truly special, as was the partnering PM10 amplifier I finally got round to a few months later ②. In between the two I reviewed by far the most impressive loudspeaker I heard all year, the Q Acoustics Concept 500 ③. A bit of a leap in the dark for a company until then best known for very affordable designs, this magnificent model delivers all the power, poise and excitement any listener could ever want.

More recently I was impressed by the little Inspiration CS 2.2 all-in-one from new (to the UK) company AVM ④. It may be down near the entry level of the German manufacturer's very extensive range but it has not just all the hallmarks of a very well sorted system but the smoothness and generosity to ensure it will have wide appeal.

The greatest surprise of the year? KEF's LS50 Wireless ⑤, the pair of speakers that thinks it's a complete system. The Kent-based company has not only 'activated' its acclaimed LS50 speakers, complete with their striking UniQ drivers, but also built in DAC functionality and the ability to stream music from network storage, all under app control. They're not quite perfect – at the time of the review, gapless playback was still not in place – and of course they face the same service and format arms race confronting any manufacturer in the network audio arena right now. However, their performance shows the wisdom of their concept as a very appealing product, and I'd love to hear what the KEF engineers could do with a larger speaker as the 'donor'. They could just be the shape of things to come. ⑥

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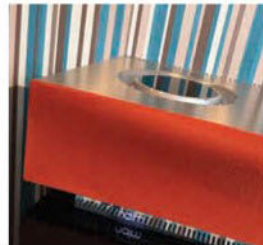
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NOTES & LETTERS

André Cluytens's sole Poulenc recording • A great harpsichordist • Ogden Nash's verses

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Cluytens and Poulenc

In Mike Ashman's Icons article on the conductor André Cluytens (November, page 68), I was surprised that he didn't mention the classic 1953 recording of Francis Poulenc's opera *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. Is it because Cluytens never recorded anything else by Poulenc that we tend to forget his role in the success of this performance? Certainly the composer recognised the conductor's contribution when he wrote to Henri Hell: 'Don't you think the recording is marvellous? It is one of the greatest joys of my life [...] Cluytens is sensational. It explodes, sizzles, laments, grows taut, mellows.' High praise from someone who never minced words where performances of his music were concerned!

Nicholas Deutsch
Cambridge, MA, USA

Impractical cats

I cast an amused and quizzical eye over Jeremy Nicholas's disparaging letter (December, page 148) about Rawsthorne's *Practical Cats*. I have known the work since my early teens, my interest having been sparked by Rawsthorne's own recording of the Overture. Jeremy Nicholas is *not* correct in assuming that he is the only person to have performed the work live in recent times. The RNCM library contains Rawsthorne's own piano version of the work, and this has been edited and completed by another of your contributors, Peter Dickinson. This version has had three recent performances, twice by Eleanor Bron and once by the former BBC producer Mark Rowlinson who has now recorded the work for issue on the Divine Art label alongside the recently rediscovered Chamber Cantata, sung by mezzo-soprano Clare Wilkinson. However, Jeremy Nicholas *is* correct in commenting on the difficulty of the work. It demands the extremely rare combination of acute musicality able to cope with subtle and complex rhythms (which are notated very precisely) and an actor's ability to characterise cleverly the personalities of the feline participants in the cycle.

I should declare an interest, being, like the composer, a Mancunian, and having

Letter of the Month



Zuzana Růžicková, who overcame appalling experiences in the 1940s and '50s, was an inspiration

Zuzana Růžicková, a gently defiant genius

Thank you for providing us with an excellent obituary (November, page 131) of the harpsichordist and pianist Zuzana Růžicková, such a fine – and brave – artist.

I first encountered her 53 years ago, when I bought the Supraphon recording of Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto, with Michail Voskresensky and the Prague RSO under Václav Jiráček. It remains a favourite record of mine. On the other side was Růžicková's performance of the Piano Concerto by her husband Viktor Kalabis. This was a new work to me, but I have loved it ever since, although I have never heard it in concert. I played both sides last night.

Despite the appalling experiences she and her mother suffered in Theresienstadt/Terezín, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and the loss of their home and its contents, she stuck at her musical studies. Her own and her husband's refusal to join the Communist party meant her career was blocked, but her loyalty to her family meant she remained in Czechoslovakia, yet her Bach performances made her world-famous.

What role models she and Viktor Kalabis have been, and not just as musicians!

Robert Bell
Banbury, Oxon

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established the Rawsthorne Trust, as well as having discovered two missing works, the Suite for recorder and piano and the Chamber Cantata. The serendipitous story as to how that reappeared is recounted in a recent issue of *The Creel*, the journal of the Rawsthorne Trust.

John Turner
Stockport, Greater Manchester

More British symphonies

Many readers will know the special rewards and delights of attending a live concert. Nevertheless, I feel disappointed that there are so many works neglected by concert planners, particularly British symphonies. I would love the opportunity to attend a live performance of the magnificent Third or Sixth

Symphonies of Arnold Bax – but this is hope more than expectation.

Andrew Lewis
Caerphilly, South Wales

Brabbins is championing Tippett's symphonies on record, which is a start (see page 24)! – Ed.

Time to retire Nash's verses?

Tim Ashley's review of Alexander Armstrong's CD (November, page 46) of

works for orchestra and narrator draws attention to Ogden Nash's verses for *Carnival of the Animals*. There's no excuse for perpetuating these dated utterly fatuous verses. Many others have written far better verses, among those your own Jeremy Nicholas who has even recorded them with pianists David Nettle and Richard Markham (Netmark, 4/08).

Nick Forton
Chiswick, London W4

OBITUARIES

A feisty soprano known for her Puccini, and a great French organist

CAROL NEBLETT

Soprano
Born February 1, 1946
Died November 23, 2017



Justly celebrated for her performances in the role of Minnie in Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*, Carol Neblett has died, aged 71.

Born in Modesto, California, Neblett studied at UCLA and made her operatic debut as Musetta (*La bohème*) with New York City Opera in 1969. She would perform with the company on many occasions (operas included *Mefistofele*, *Prince Igor*, *Faust*, *Manon*, *Louise*, *La traviata*, *Don Giovanni* and *Le nozze di Figaro*). In 1973, her brief nude scene in a New Orleans production of Massenet's *Thaïs* made international headlines.

She also sang regularly at New York's Met where operas included *Der fliegende Holländer* (her house debut), *Tosca*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Don Giovanni*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Falstaff* and *La fanciulla*.

In 1976 she sang *Tosca* opposite Luciano Pavarotti in Chicago and the following year she appeared in the Covent Garden production of Puccini's *La fanciulla* with Plácido Domingo, Zubin Mehta conducting. The subsequent DG set won *Gramophone's* Recording of the Year in 1978: 'If there is one contribution which sets the seal on the whole project and makes it an essential set for any Puccinian it is the singing of Carol Neblett as the Girl of the Golden West herself,' wrote Edward Greenfield in September 1978. Other recordings included Musetta (EMI, conducted by James Levine), Claudio Abbado's Chicago set of Mahler's Second Symphony (DG) and Marietta in RCA's set of Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* conducted by Erich Leinsdorf.

Neblett taught at Chapman University in Southern California and was on the staff of the International Lyric Academy in Rome. She was married three times; her second husband was the conductor Kenneth Schermerhorn with whom she had a son who survives her.

MICHEL CHAPUIS

Organist and teacher
Born January 15, 1930
Died November 12, 2017



A specialist in French and German Baroque organ music, Michel Chapuis has died. He was 87.

Born in Dôle where he received his initial training, Chapuis later studied with René Mählerherbe (composition) and Edouard Souberbielle (organ) at the École César Franck in Paris. His other teachers included Émile Poillot and, at the Conservatoire in Paris, Marcel Dupré. He won the Conservatoire's top prizes for organ and improvisation.

He worked as organist at various Parisian churches and, in 1995, was appointed organist to the Chapel Royal in Versailles. He also taught at a number of conservatories including those in Strasbourg, Besançon and Paris.

His passion for music of the Baroque era led him to explore historically informed performance practice and he performed every surviving French organ work from the 17th and 18th centuries on the Clicquot organ of St Nicolas des Champs in Paris.

Chapuis also recorded extensively, including, between 1966 and 1970, the complete organ works of JS Bach (for Valois). In tandem with his performance and recordings of early organ music, he spearheaded the restoration of historic organs in France.

NEXT MONTH FEBRUARY 2018



The unstoppable Kopatchinskaja

Andrew Mellor encounters the whirlwind that is violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja and is bowled over by her interpretations of Ravel and Poulenc, part of a new sonata recording on Alpha Classics

Jansons at 75

Michael McManus catches up with Mariss Jansons as the Latvian conductor contemplates his imminent 75th birthday

Shostakovich's Violin Concerto

David Gutman listens to recordings of the work, consigned to a drawer for seven years after completion, and picks the best

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







































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Sir David Eastwood

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Birmingham on the parallels between managing an orchestra and running a large institution

I'm very puritanical about honouring work events and the only thing I have ever cancelled was when Edward Gardner and the CBSO were doing Mendelssohn's Second Symphony, which I'd never heard live. And I thought Mendelssohn, *Lobgesang*, Birmingham ... there's not going to be another chance, so I did bunk off an event for that! It was very fine.

My parents said that when I was three I announced that I wanted to be a violinist. I started playing it when I was six and until I was 16 I still wanted to be a violinist. I was well taught, I grew up in Manchester and played a lot in the city's orchestras, and then, as so often happens, I wasn't quite good enough. I had a fabulous history teacher who said I was the best student he'd ever taught and told my parents so, and it was an easy transition from having music as my career to having it as my principal passion.

Then I went to Oxford to read history. I played a lot there but I stopped having regular lessons. I thought I'd be found out but got away with it for three years as the technique stayed (we did *Brandenburg* No 5 and I did the solo part and I was the only non-music student). Then I graduated, got married immediately, started my DPhil and there was less time. So I didn't really play properly. But I've started again. I bought a viola a couple of years ago to try and con myself into getting some technique back.

I'm an avid record collector and started reading *Gramophone* at the age of 14. I suppose I started collecting when I was in the fifth form. My parents used to take us to Stratford-upon-Avon for three days to see the Shakespeare plays and we were driving there one day and I heard this snatch of music on Radio 3. It was like nothing I'd ever heard before. I thought 'Is this Shostakovich? No, it can't be but sounds a bit like it.' And when we got home I got the *Radio Times* out and it was the Scherzo from Bruckner's Ninth where you've got the D and E flat together. So I thought I must get a recording and went into Manchester, to this wonderful shop called Rare Records in John Dalton Street. 'I'd like to buy a recording of Bruckner Nine.' And this would never happen nowadays: they said, 'You need to talk to John. He's our Bruckner specialist.' So then I had to pretend I really knew this symphony when I really didn't! And they sold me the 1966 DG Karajan which I think is the best of his recordings.

My record collection is multiple recordings of works that really matter to me. So at the last count, I think I have about 21 box-sets of the Beethoven symphonies. My largely unachievable ambition in life is to present Radio 3's *Building a Library*. At least in the privacy of my own home I can!

The truth is that I'm a lapsed academic since I've been running universities and UK higher education for the past



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nearly 20 years now, but I was a historian of the 18th and 19th centuries and what I wrote most about was the process of state formation – how do states constitute themselves, how do they reform themselves, how do they distribute and concentrate power?

When you move into these sorts of leadership roles it's very interesting what your points of reference are. So I was a historian of state and structures of political power and culture, and that's not a bad training for leading complex institutions. But also, because I'm interested in music and because I'm fascinated with performance – and the shaping and co-ordination of performance, which is conducting – I think there is certainly a metaphor that is quite interesting. There is a kind of parallel that if you want the university to improve its performance, the 'string section' has got to be better or you need a new principal oboe or whatever. But the other thing – and this is enormously important – universities are places of great creativity and so the space to 'perform' is really important. If the way a university is led constrains that, you won't get the performance you want, you won't get the excitement and you won't get the people you want to attract. ⑥

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